

NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
Office of Archives and History
Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Lee and Helen George House

Hickory, Catawba County, CT1078, Listed 4/24/2012

Nomination by Beth Keane

Photographs by Beth Keane, April 2011



Façade view



Rear view

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of property

historic name George, Lee and Helen, House

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 16 Ninth Avenue, NE not for publication N/A

city or town Hickory vicinity N/A

state North Carolina code NC county Catawba code 035 zip code 28601

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
____ entered in the National Register ____ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
____ determined eligible for the National Register ____ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
____ determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
____ removed from the National Register	_____	_____
____ other (explain): _____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

roof asphalt

walls stone

weatherboard

other glass

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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.)

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or a grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1951

Significant Dates

1951

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Tashiro, Aiji – architect

Abee, D. Carroll – architect

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: _____

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**George, Lee and Helen, House
Catawba County, NC**

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Lee and Helen George House, a single-story Modernist dwelling built in 1951, stands facing north about fifty feet from the front property line at 16 Ninth Avenue, NE, in Hickory's Combford Park subdivision, immediately north of the Claremont High School National Register Historic District (NR 1986/2009) and about a mile north of Hickory's downtown. In addition, the house is located one-and-one-half blocks west of Route 127, a major artery that runs in a north-south direction through Hickory. The one-story Modernist ranch house was one of the first homes to be built in the Combford Park development. The neighborhood has since filled in with 1950s and '60s ranch and Colonial Revival-style houses set on spacious lots with approximate forty- to fifty-foot setbacks from the street.

The George House, designed by Aiji Tashiro, a Japanese-American architect and brother-in-law to the owner, Helen George, with construction managed by D. Carroll Abee, a well-known Hickory architect experienced in residential design, is a striking contemporary home much influenced by the Usonian houses of Frank Lloyd Wright. The compound plan with a center main block has projecting rooms on both the east and west ends of the façade, a rear wing, and an attached carport. Built on a slab, exterior finishes include Crab Orchard stone on much of the lower portion of the walls surmounted by wide Redwood weatherboards. Large fixed-sash windows, some with stone sills and louvered circulation vents, either flanking the windows or positioned below them, are a distinctive feature of the house. The flanking vents include three, stacked on either side, while the lower vents are either singles or doubles. The rear (south) wall of the main block of the home is almost entirely of glass, flooding the living areas of the home with natural light. The house is further distinguished by a flat built-up roof with deep, overhanging eaves, a boxed cornice, and metal coping. A low railing near the center of the roof is comprised of square wood posts and horizontal wood slats. Added when the air conditioning was installed in the early 1970s, the railing encircles and screens a central chimney and the mechanical systems.

The residential parcel, with a slight slope towards the rear and to the west, is enhanced by mature trees and shrubs with spacious lawn areas in the front and rear yards. A curvilinear five-foot wide stone walkway leads from the curved driveway, located left (east) of the house, to a front stone entry courtyard enclosed by a three-foot high stone wall. The courtyard is softened by plantings arranged in front of the stone wall and in a low stone L-shaped planter located in the northwest corner and along the west side of the courtyard. An expansive stone terrace is located at the rear of the house with sliding glass doors opening onto the terrace from both the living and dining areas. The stone on the house is laid in random horizontal rows and is about three feet in height on the front and side elevations of the front ell, but only about one foot on the rear section of the house. All stone utilized on the exterior and interior of the house is Crab Orchard stone, a rare sandstone quarried from the Crab Orchard Mountain of the Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee. Predominately

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rose in color, this mottled stone is streaked in irregular patterns with various shades of brown. The stone harmonizes well with many earth-toned products and plant materials.

The façade (north elevation) features a front entrance flanked on the west by two large fixed-pane windows. The door and both windows are each surmounted by a single-pane clerestory window. East of the door is a large picture window placed directly above three single circulation vents. A column of layered stone separates the front door from the picture window. A flanking wall west of the front entrance has one fixed-pane window over a false circulation vent. The projecting front wings each feature a single-sash, fixed-pane, window with flanking vents.

Five windows are located on the east elevation – two positioned on the projecting northeast master bedroom suite. The larger of the two windows provides light for the bedroom and is flanked by three vertical circulation vents. The smaller window, with three vertical vents positioned on the window's south side, illuminates the bathroom. Two double casement windows, located on the east wall of the main block of the house, provide natural light for the kitchen. A single casement window illuminates the powder room.

The projecting rear wing, located behind the kitchen and at a somewhat lower grade, accommodates a narrow hall passage and the home's recreation room. The rear wing's exterior features a low stone foundation and is clad with wide Redwood weatherboards. A double carport, with a flat roof supported by metal posts and a metal cross beam, is attached to the wing's east elevation. A small storage shed is positioned in the southwest corner of the carport. An entrance door provides access from the carport to a small service hall.

One window flanked by circulation vents is centrally located on the projecting rear wing's south (rear) elevation wall. An impressive stone barbecue fireplace and chimney, positioned at the east end of the rear stone terrace, dominates the wing's west elevation. The barbecue, incorporated into a stone wall behind it, is comprised of a base with two wood storage compartments and an ash pit with cast iron doors and a central grill. A wide stone chimney, featuring several recessed stone panels, rises from the base and pierces the wide overhanging eave of the house. A large picture window with flanking vents is located south of the fireplace, while a vertical fixed-sash window with a double lower vent is found north of the fireplace.

The south (rear) elevation of the main block of the house is comprised primarily of floor-to-ceiling, wood-framed, glazed windows and two pairs of sliding-glass doors surmounted by transoms. Layered stone accent either end of the wall. A spacious raised stone terrace enclosed by a low stone wall complements the back of the house, while providing space for gracious outdoor entertaining. Stone steps, flanked on one side by a low stone wall provide access from the lawn to the terrace. The steps are positioned at the northwest corner of the terrace, adjacent to the house. A fixed-glass window with two lower vents is centered on the rear (south) wall of the bedroom wing.

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The home's west elevation features five single-pane vertical windows of two different sizes, each positioned over double circulation vents. The Crab Orchard stone rises to approximately three feet on the front section of the elevation (northwest bedroom) with weatherboards above the stone. The rear section (bedroom wing) features a Crab Orchard stone foundation with weatherboard walls.

The home retains most of its interior finishes. Wood paneling utilized throughout the house, prepared to show its natural grain, is comprised of birch, Philippine mahogany, and korina (West African veneer) woods. The house also retains its original hydronic in-floor heating system, a simple, but effective, slab-on-grade, radiant system consisting of a furnace dug below-grade near the center of the structure and wrought iron pipes embedded in the slab to distribute the heat. The radiant heating system built into the slab foundation of the George House was in operation until the 1990s. The original cork floors used throughout many of the rooms in the house were replaced within five years of construction with linoleum, as radiant heat in the floors caused the cork tiles to pop up.

The off-center main entrance is recessed slightly into the dwelling's footprint. The single-leaf, solid wood front door opens into a spacious foyer that features a wood paneled nine-foot ceiling and a stone floor with a stone planter placed in front of the large window adjacent to the front door. Crab Orchard stone is utilized for the west-side wall in the entrance foyer. The wall between the front foyer and the den, located left of the foyer, features open cubicles for the display of decorative objects. The entrance to the furnace room is located across from the planter in the entry hall. Several steps descend into the furnace room which is located below grade. The room, which houses the furnace and a hot water heater, has a concrete floor and brick walls.

The central foyer expands into an open-plan living and dining area located at the rear of the house. Round incandescent lights are recessed into the ceiling which slants upward from the glazed south wall to the north wall. Narrow eight-foot long rectangular fluorescent ceiling lights are mounted on either end of the room. The floor-to-ceiling glass windows and sliding-glass doors in the south wall flood the room with light. The east and west walls of the spacious room are faced with layered stone, while the north wall and ceiling are sheathed with wood panels. Linoleum floors in this room and throughout the house replaced the original cork floors. A brick-lined fireplace, surrounded by rectangular-cut Crab Orchard stone outlined by picture frame molding, is incorporated into the north wall of the living room area. The fireplace hearth consists of a flat stone, level with the floor.

To the left of the entrance foyer is a room referred to on the architect's plans as "the hide out room," otherwise known as a den. Built-in cabinets and bookshelves occupy the south wall of the room, while the remaining walls and ceiling are sheathed with wood paneling. A large picture window with three lower vents dominates the north (front) wall of the room. The louvered air vents, located either adjacent to or beneath, many of the fixed-pane windows in the house allowed for

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natural air circulation. While the exterior vanes of the louvers repel the rain, the ventilation panels on the interior direct the breeze to the ceiling in the summers, stirring the air in each room.

A door on the east wall of the den opens into a small hall from which can be accessed the master bedroom and bathroom located in the northeast corner of the house. The master bedroom features paneled wood walls and cedar-lined closets with double doors, built-ins, and overhead storage cupboards. A wood headboard with shelves for the bed is original to the room, as is much of the furniture in the house. A bathroom is located adjacent to the bedroom, behind the closets. The bathroom retains the original materials and fixtures including wood sheathed walls and ceiling, the ceramic tile in the bathtub and separate shower, and the porcelain sink.

A passage leads from the right of the front foyer to three bedrooms on the west side of the house. The rear bedroom and the middle bedroom share a hall bathroom, while the third bedroom, located in the northwest corner of the house, has a private bathroom. All three bedrooms feature nine-foot ceilings, wood paneled walls, square incandescent flush-mounted lights, and cedar-lined closets with double doors, built-in shelving, and double cupboards. A built-in curvilinear desk is located in the northwest corner bedroom. Both bathrooms feature wood sheathed walls and ceilings, linoleum floors, original tile, and porcelain sinks and fixtures.

A small broom closet, the kitchen, and a "brunch alcove" are located on the east side of the house behind the master bedroom. The broom closet is positioned in the hall between the master bathroom and the kitchen. The ceilings in this area of the house are about eight-feet high, approximately a foot lower than the bedrooms, den, and front foyer. The kitchen, which features a U-shaped arrangement of lower cabinets, retains an acoustical tile ceiling (replacement) with rectangular florescent lighting, and wood cabinets. The washer, dryer, and freezer are located in three deep kitchen closets with double doors and overhead shelving. A divider with counter-height cabinets surmounted by open shelves separates the kitchen from the brunch alcove. The brunch alcove is also sheathed with wood paneling and features built-in storage cabinets along the east wall. A window with a single lower vent on the west wall provides natural light and air circulation for the room.

The recreation room, located in the rear wing and at a slightly lower level than the main block of the house, is accessed from a small service hall located two steps down from the brunch alcove. The service hall can also be accessed from a pedestrian door opening from the carport. The spacious recreation room features vertical wood paneling, linoleum tile floors, and acoustical tile ceiling with square incandescent flush-mounted lights with glass covers. Two alcoves, located along the east wall, are utilized as a sewing space and a serving bar. A fireplace with a surround of rectangular-cut stone surmounted by a wood mantel shelf is located in the northwest corner of the room. A wood stove insert occupies the fireplace. A small powder room is located off the service hall, opposite the entrance to the recreation room.

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Integrity Statement

The original owner of the house, Helen George, worked closely with Tashiro on all the interior details and finishes. With ornamental detail kept to a minimum, the overall effect of the interior is modern, sleek, and efficient. Modifications to the interior of the house have been minimal. The original cork floors throughout the house were replaced with linoleum within five years of construction, as the cork tiles began popping up due to the radiant heat in the floors. The vinyl floors in three of the bathrooms and the kitchen have been replaced with similar material. The house retains the original acoustical tile ceilings (with the exception of the kitchen), original plywood paneling on the walls and ceilings, the original hydronic in-floor heating system, and all the original built-ins. Restoration plans are limited to adding insulation to the house, replacing some of the insulated glass in the windows, and rehabilitating the hydronic heating system.

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Significance

The 1951 Lee and Helen George House in Hickory is locally significant under Criterion C as an intact early example of Modernist residential design by architect Aiji Tashiro, a Japanese-American architect and brother-in-law to Helen George. In its plan and organization of space, the house reflects the influence of Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian house design. The Modernist dwelling, occupied until recently by the George family, was the first of its style to be built in Hickory and remains the most outstanding example of the style in the city. The period of significance is 1951, the year the house was built.

Historical Background

Lee George was born January 17, 1911, the son of Moses and Alice Kouri George, Lebanese immigrants. Moses, who moved to the United States in 1904, opened a grocery business in Lincolnton. Their first son, Alex, was born in 1909, while a daughter, Josephine, was born in 1917. In 1923 Moses opened a wholesale grocery business, Carolina Fruit and Produce Company, in Shelby (Maiewskij-Hay, pp. 19-21). Alex graduated from Duke University in 1931. Lee, who also attended Duke, left school the same year without a degree and both brothers began looking for a way to begin their business careers. On September 21, 1931, Moses George gave his sons \$17,000 in cash to buy Merchant's Produce, a wholesale food business in Hickory (Maiewskij-Hay, p. 33).

Lee married Helen Stanford Boyd, a native of Hickory, on September 15, 1938 and spent the first years of their marriage at a home on Fourteenth Avenue in Hickory (Marriage Certificate, Book 27, p. 142). Lee and Helen had four children: Joyce, Boyd, Donetta, and Alice. Brothers, Lee and Alex, worked together and sold groceries within a thirty mile radius of Hickory (Maiewskij-Hay, p. 44). Their sister Josephine also became involved with the business. Merchants Produce Company grew rapidly into Merchants Distributors, Inc. (MDI), a full-service wholesale grocery distributorship, under the leadership of Alex, Lee, and Josephine George (Maiewskij-Hay, p. 59). The company, headquartered in Hickory and currently known as Alex Lee, Inc., expanded in the 1950s to include a food service distribution business and in 1984 acquired a chain of retail supermarkets, Lowes Foods (Maiewskij-Hay, p. 17).

In addition to his work in the food industry, Lee George was a director of Northwestern Bank and a part owner of Boyd Lee Knitting Mill during the 1950s and 60s. He also was a developer of the 1965 Villa Park Shopping Center in Conover. In addition, he took an active role in his church and many local organizations and charities. As one of Hickory's first Roman Catholics, he was instrumental in the founding and growth of St. Aloysius Catholic Church, located just a block from his home (*Hickory Daily Record*, 9 Jul 1993, p. 1A)

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On July 14, 1950, Lee and Helen purchased a lot in the newly-platted Combford Park development in northeast Hickory (Deed Book 430, p. 225). They retained Aiji Tashiro, married to Helen's sister, Florence, to design a contemporary house for their growing family (George interview, December 6, 2010).

Tashiro, born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, in 1908 to Japanese immigrants, spent most of his youth in Seattle, Washington. He held various jobs as a young man, working on the railroad, in logging camps, and in the fish canneries of the Pacific Northwest. Tashiro was eventually accepted to the University of Cincinnati through the influence of a Japanese-American professor, also named Tashiro (no relation). Dr. Tashiro, a biologist, acted as a mentor to the young Tashiro, and may have influenced his decision to study horticulture and landscape architecture (Gener Tashiro, son of Aiji Tashiro, e-mail message to author, December 15, 2010).

After receiving his degree in landscape architecture from the University of Cincinnati in 1933, Tashiro worked for a year as a landscape architect with the Ohio Historical and Archeological Society. The following year, he accepted employment with the Cincinnati Park and Recreation Commission during which time he developed landscape plans for some of the city's parks, schools, and hospitals. In 1936, Tashiro opened an office in the center of the city and began his private practice. He soon developed a portfolio of projects for rich patrons, many of them wealthy German-Jewish residents who referred him to other would-be patrons. During the six years he spent in Cincinnati, Tashiro distinguished himself in the area of master planning in a wide assortment of projects (Gener Tashiro, e-mail message, December 15, 2010).

In 1939, Tashiro accepted a job offer from the Appalachian State Teachers College in Boone, North Carolina. His main assignment was to assist in the development of a master plan for the campus, although he was also expected to teach several courses at the school. At the same time, he was given leeway to participate in the design of some of the school's buildings. Licensing did not exist in most places and it was common for designers to work in related professions in addition to their own specialty. During his one-year tenure at Appalachian State Teachers College, Tashiro assisted in the design of the Physics and Applied Sciences Building. He also designed the faculty housing along River Street, in addition to his regular duties of developing landscape plans for the grounds and teaching classes in Western Civilization (Gener Tashiro, e-mail message, December 15, 2010).

After a year at the college, Tashiro accepted a job as the staff landscape designer for Howard Hickory Nursery and often went out in the field as part of the installation crews. He familiarized himself with native North Carolina plants and local installation practices. His work allowed him to build a professional network with contractors in the building trades, as well as gain a deeper understanding of the local communities and become acquainted with some of their leading citizens. His network of business associates and friendships proved helpful during this

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time period prior to World War II when United States-Japanese relations had grown tense (Gener Tashiro, e-mail message, December 15, 2010).

After the war, Tashiro left Howard Hickory Nursery and set up his own landscape architecture practice in Wilkesboro. He married Florence Boyd, a Hickory native, and shortly thereafter, became associated with D. Carroll Abee, an architect practicing in Hickory. This business relationship, which lasted from approximately 1948 through 1952, helped Tashiro establish his architecture credentials (Gener Tashiro, e-mail message, December 15, 2010). His wife's sister, Helen George, hired Tashiro to design a house for her family in northeast Hickory and worked closely with him in developing the design and interior finishes of the house (Donetta and Alice George interview with author, December 6, 2010). Tashiro worked on the house plans on his own time in the evenings and on weekends (D. Carroll Abee, Jr., son of architect, interview with author, April 5, 2010). The result was a Modernist house unique for the time to the stock of existing residential architecture in Hickory which tended towards more traditional Colonial Revivals, bungalows, and ranch houses.

Lee and Helen George raised their four children in their house at 16 Ninth Avenue, NE, and resided there the remainder of their lives. Lee George died on July 8, 1993, and his wife, Helen, died on October 1, 2008 (Death Certificates Book 79, p. 387 and Book 94, p. 1333). The house is currently held in the Helen George Trust with the four George children as trustees (Estate File 08 E 1060).

Architectural Context

The Lee and Helen George House is the earliest identified Modernist dwelling in Hickory. The town's twentieth century housing stock pre-dating 1950 included the Craftsman and Colonial Revival styles popular in the first decades of the century as well as the Period Revival styles of the 1930s; these trends are evident in neighborhoods like Oakwood, Kenworth, and Claremont (NRHDs 1986, 1985, and 1986). In the immediate post-war years, one-and-a-half-story Cape Cod and one-story ranch and minimal traditional houses, some with modest Colonial Revival detailing, predominated the city's outlying neighborhoods.

Across the state, only a few Modernist dwellings had been built before 1950. Durham's International Style Gamble House (altered) (NR 1979) had been built in 1935 and Black Mountain College erected some low-cost Modernist faculty houses in the 1940s. The 1948 establishment of the School of Design at North Carolina State College in Raleigh brought Modernist architects to teach at the school, and they began building houses for themselves immediately. By 1954, Henry Kamphoefner, George Matsumoto, James Fitzgibbon, Eduardo Catalano, Milton Small had all designed and built Modernist houses for themselves or clients in

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Raleigh (Black, MPDF, Early Modern Architecture in Raleigh Associated with the Faculty of the North Carolina State University School of Design, Raleigh, NC, 1994, Sec. E, pp. 10-13).

Although the designer of the George House, Aiji Tashiro, was trained as a landscape architect, he clearly became interested early in his career in the concept of design for an entire site: landscape and architecture. His original practice as a successful landscape designer was in Cincinnati, Ohio, during the mid-1930s. After moving to North Carolina in 1939, he became best known in Lenoir as a landscape architect. Although he never received formal training in architecture, he managed through his association and apprenticeship with practicing architects, along with taking a few courses on the side, to become a licensed architect in North Carolina. Through his partnership with Hickory architect D. Carroll Abee from 1944 through 1952, he became proficient in the design of Colonial Revival-style residences. His designs for houses, schools, churches, and factories can be found in Hickory, Concord, Newton, Valdese, and in Wilkes County. He obtained licenses to practice in other states as well, usually for a specific client and project. Tashiro opened his own business in Wilkesboro about 1960 and maintained his architectural practice until approximately 1987. He died in 1994 at the age of eighty-six (Gener Tashiro e-mail message to author, December 15, 2010).

The George House, one of Tashiro's earliest architecture designs, clearly falls into the humanist strain of Modernism and, in fact, has much in common with the Usonian house type developed by Frank Lloyd Wright in the 1930s. Designed to control costs, Wright's Usonian houses had no attics, no basements, and little ornamentation. The word *Usonia* is an abbreviation for United States of North America. Wright aspired to create a democratic, distinctly American style that was affordable for the "common people." The Usonian house type actually grew out of Wright's earlier Prairie style homes. Both styles featured low roofs and open living areas with high ceilings. Both styles made abundant use of brick, wood, and other natural material on both the exterior and interior. The Usonian homes however, were small, one-story structures set on concrete slabs with piping for radiant heat beneath. The kitchens were often incorporated into the living areas. Built-in furniture and storage, included to maximize the efficient use of space, were common elements of the homes. Open carports took the place of garages. Other identifiable features include an orientation to outdoor spaces, particularly the backyard terrace with large expanses of glazing in the back, privacy from the front, sequestered bedrooms, a flat roof, and simple lines with few ornamental details (Lind, pp 9-16).

The George House follows the Usonian house type formula almost in its entirety. Wright generally hid the entrance to his Usonian houses and created a sheltered pathway to the door. Although the main entrance to the George House is visible from the road, the approach to the front entrance is by a curving path from the driveway that leads to a courtyard enclosed by a low stone wall, thereby adding a degree of privacy. Apparently, a tree was originally planted within the courtyard, which would have further hidden the entrance from the road. Tashiro's only

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principal departure from the typical Usonian plan was separating the master bedroom, located close to the kitchen, from the secluded bedroom wing on the opposite side of the house.

The George House also is reminiscent of Wright's earlier Prairie houses with its palette of natural materials and conscious horizontality. The combination of Redwood weatherboards and Crab Orchard stone emphasizes the horizontal, ground-hugging appearance of the house. The bedding of the stone creates a wainscot effect on the exterior walls that extends into the front patio, planters, and rear terrace. The louvered vents also contribute to the visual flow. Integrated carefully into a slightly sloping site, the house tends to blend in with its surrounding landscape—staying low and unobtrusive while using natural colors and materials. In addition, the continuity of the warm, natural materials on the interior of the house unfold as one passes through the foyer into the main living/dining room space, and on into the kitchen and breakfast alcove.

Like most of the Usonian houses, the more dramatic elevation of the George House can be found on the southern, private side of the house. The floor-to-ceiling glass windows and doors located along the south wall of the home's main living space look out onto a spacious stone terrace beyond which is a level backyard enclosed by a hedge of holly bushes and shaded by several large oak and maple trees. The south-faced glazing is balanced with a deep overhang, so that the living spaces are shaded in the summer and warmed by the sun in the winter.

In this mid-twentieth-century era before air conditioning was widely utilized, Tashiro implemented an unusual feature in the design of the house--the placement of adjustable louvered vents either flanking or placed underneath the large fixed-glass windows. Although Tashiro felt that windows had three functions: to provide light, security, and ventilation, he did not see the need to address each of these functions conventionally--with a moveable sash and locks. The exterior slats of the louver repel the rain, while the ventilation panels on the interior direct the breeze to the ceiling in the summers, stirring the air in each room. The design allows for air circulation while keeping the house secure. Tashiro's son, Gener Tashiro, reveals that his father used louvers such as this in other home designs throughout his career and the details always came from the George House prototype (Gener Tashiro e-mail message to author, December 18, 2010).

One of the more interesting aspects of the George House is the use of a "hydronic radiant heating system," a component often employed in Wright's Usonian homes. Heating a home by hydronic radiant floor heating became popular following World War II, when there was a demand for small, compact, affordable homes of four to six rooms to house the returning veterans starting new families. Equipping many of these homes with radiant floor heating was done because it was quick, easy, economical, and comfortable. Levitt & Sons of Manhasset, New York built over 10,000 of these small radiant homes in just a few years beginning in 1947. All the tubing runs began and ended near the "water heater" or boiler. Balancing valves were the

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only controls supplied to adjust heat delivery to each circuit. The system in the George House was designed by William P. Wells who formed Mechanical Engineers, Inc. in 1949. The pipes utilized are "Byers welded wrought iron" manufactured by A. M. Byers Company of Pittsburgh. A bed of vermiculite insulation below the slab reduces the heat loss to the soil. The hydronic radiant heating system built into the slab foundation of the George House is intact and was in operation until the 1990s. Plans are underway to restore the heating system with the use of modern controls (Gener Tashiro e-mail to author, December 31, 2010).

Several homes in nearby Newton and Conover have been identified as Aiji Tashiro designs (Joyce George Corbett e-mail to author, April 11, 2011). The 1953 McLaughlin House, located at 237 Eighth Street, NW, in Conover, is another good example of a Usonian house design and is similar to the George House in a number of ways. The one-story Modernist house sits on a slight rise and is incorporated into a magnificent landscape setting. It features brick veneer siding with wood trim, a flat roof with deep overhangs, large windows, and a carport off one end of the house. Similar to the George House, the living and dining rooms incorporate one wall of floor-to-ceiling windows. The interior is also reminiscent with interior wood paneling, recessed lighting, the use of natural materials, and numerous built-ins. The arrangement of rooms is slightly different, however, with three bedrooms located behind the living/dining room and arranged around a central core made up of closets and bathrooms. A separate guest suite is located to one side of the living room, while a separate wing on the opposite side encompasses the kitchen, den, and breakfast rooms.

The 1957 Corne House, located at 1428 Southwest Boulevard (US 321 business) in Newton, is also identifiable as a Tashiro design (Joyce George Corbett e-mail to author, April 11, 2011). Set well back from the highway, the one-story Modernist House features a flat roof with a deep overhang, a recessed private entrance, large windows (originally with circulation vents), a large rear deck and terrace, and a side carport. The mostly brick veneer house also incorporates some redwood siding. Like the George House, the interior features wood paneling, built-ins, recessed lighting, and a separate bedroom wing.

A fourth house designed by Tashiro, located at 1115 Third Avenue, NW, Conover, was built in 1957 (Joyce George Corbett e-mail to author, April 11, 2011). The house sits on three acres in a wooded setting. The one-level Modernist dwelling features a deeply recessed entrance, brick veneer and weatherboard siding, large windows, a carport located off one end, and a low-pitched gabled roof. The interior was not accessible.

Although it is very likely that Tashiro designed other houses in Hickory, they have not, as of yet, been identified. The Lee and Helen George House, however, may have inspired the construction of another Modernist house, built in 1959, in the Combford Park neighborhood. Located around the corner from the George House at 960 North Center Street, NE, is a one-story

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dwelling with a flat roof, deep overhangs, an attached garage and a rear attached carport. Several elevations of the house are clad with stone similar to the Crab Orchard Stone found on the George House. The remainder of the L-shaped home is clad with brick veneer. Floor-to-ceiling windows are located on the front of the house.

Several additional houses located in the northwest sector of Hickory were also built in the later 1950s and are very simplistic Modernist or contemporary designs. A 1958 one-story dwelling at 467 16th Avenue, NW, is rectangular in shape with a flat roof, small windows, and brick veneer siding. It features an attached carport and a rear patio. Built in 1959 and located at 707 15th Avenue, NW, is a one-story, rectangular shape house with a flat roof, brick veneer siding, attached carport, and rear terrace. A third house, located at 1045 15th Avenue, NW, was built in 1958, but heavily modified in 2001. The one-story house with basement also features a flat roof, brick veneer siding, and an attached garage. The interiors of these three houses were not accessible. In general, the houses are very plain, boxy structures with no ornamental detailing. They are scattered throughout a neighborhood with more traditional Colonial Revival, Cape Cod, and ranch house designs.

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Geographical Data

The boundaries coincide with the legal bounds of parcel 370315644180.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes part of lots three and four in Block 15 in the Combford Park subdivision, comprising the 0.51-acre parcel historically associated with the house.

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**George, Lee and Helen, House
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The following information applies to all photographs:

Name of Property: Lee and Helen George House
County and State where property is located: Catawba County, North Carolina
Address: 16 Ninth Avenue, NE, Hickory
Name of Photographer: Beth Keane
Date of Photographs: Photos April, 2011
Location of Original Negatives: North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh

Photographs:

Photograph 1: North elevation (façade), camera looking south

Photograph 2: East elevation, camera looking southwest

Photograph 3: South elevation (carport), camera looking north

Photograph 4: South elevation, camera looking north

Photograph 5: South and west elevations (oblique), camera looking northeast

Photograph 6: West elevation, camera looking southeast

Photograph 7: North elevation (courtyard and front entrance), camera looking north

Photograph 8: Interior, Living Room, camera looking west

Photograph 9: Interior, Front Foyer, camera looking east

Photograph 10: Interior, Kitchen, Breakfast Room, camera looking southeast

Photograph 11: Backyard, camera looking east

Lee and Helen George House
16 Ninth Avenue, NE
Hickory, NC
Catawba County
1 inch = approx. 10 feet

