

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

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Thomas and Lois Wheless House

Louisburg, Franklin County, FK0551, Listed 8/28/2007
Nomination by Laura A. W. Phillips
Photographs by Laura A. W. Phillips, September 2006



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 Wheless, Thomas and Lois, House

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 106 John Street not for publication N/A
city or town Louisburg vicinity N/A
state North Carolina code NC county Franklin code 069 zip code 27549

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
North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources
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 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet. | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register | _____ | _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other (explain): _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

Wheless, Thomas and Lois, House
Name of Property

Franklin Co., NC
County and State

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>3</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>3</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
DOMESTIC secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)
MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
roof Other: Built-up
walls Wood
Glass
other Metal

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

Wheless, Thomas and Lois, House
Name of Property

Franklin Co., NC
County and State

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.

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1955

Significant Dates

1955

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Small, G. Milton -- Architect

Areas of Significance

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: _____

Wheless, Thomas and Lois, House
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10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Approx. 1

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing
1 17 743460 3998250
2

Zone Easting Northing
3
4
 See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Laura A. W. Phillips, Architectural Historian

organization N/A date November 7, 2006

street & number 637 North Spring Street telephone 336/727-1968

city or town Winston-Salem state NC zip code 27101

12. Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Lois B. Wheless, c/o Kay Wheless Woodward

street & number 1056 Brookhaven Lane telephone (404) 816-1788

city or town Atlanta state GA zip code 30319

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service

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Wheless, Thomas and Lois, House
Franklin County, North Carolina

DESCRIPTION

Materials, cont'd.

Walls – Stone

Summary and Setting

Built during 1954 and 1955, the Thomas and Lois Wheless House is a glass, wood, and stone Modernist dwelling of Miesian design influence. The main body of the one-story house is rectangular in shape, measuring thirty feet wide and seventy-two feet deep, and has a low-pitched, east-west gable roof. A twelve-foot-wide service ell with a flat roof extends thirty feet from the north side of the house near its east end. A carport projects from the west end of the north elevation. The interior follows an asymmetrical plan. The house is designed with a strong sense of balance in the arrangement of its horizontal, vertical, and spatial elements; a combination of both privacy and openness; an economy of space in its use of built-in storage; and a use of beautiful materials. The house is accompanied by three outbuildings---a workshop and two sheds.

Located at 106 John Street in a quiet, residential neighborhood of Louisburg in North Carolina's northeastern piedmont region, the house stands near the center of a mostly wooded lot of approximately one acre that has a street frontage of 300 feet. The majority of the lot is surrounded by a seven-foot-tall privacy fence composed of vertical wood boards. The current fence is a replacement of the original privacy fence, which had horizontal boards. A two-car-wide concrete driveway leads from the street to the carport. The driveway is paralleled on the south by a nandina-bordered sidewalk that leads from the street to the house. The sidewalk then continues eastward along the north side of the house to the main entrance near the juncture of the north elevation and the service wing. As it parallels the house, the walk is bordered on the north side by a planting strip and on the south side by a strip of white pea gravel. A landscaped lawn, measuring approximately twenty-five feet from the house and front fence to the street, borders the front of the property. Within the fenced area of the property, a grassy strip with concrete stepping squares fills the space between the west end of the house and the privacy fence. On the north side of the house, between the carport and the service wing, a small garden is bordered on the south by the entrance area of the house, on the east by the service wing, and on the north and west sides by the privacy fence. It contains a variety of plantings, a gravel walk, and a small fish pond. The gravel walk continues along the north and east sides of the service wing. A scored concrete terrace wraps around the east and south sides of the house. From the west end of the terrace, a scored concrete walk leads southward toward a wooded area. A landscaped lawn with

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a curvilinear outer border extends outward from the east and south sides of the house. Wooded areas along the north, east and south boundaries of the property, containing sycamore, pine, river birch, holly, magnolia, and dogwood trees, form the remainder of the setting for the house.

Construction Features and Exterior

To supplement the exterior description, see the attached architect's drawing of the elevations.

The house rests on a concrete-slab foundation reinforced with steel that allows for the incorporation of a crawl space beneath the slab for access to plumbing. The low, above-ground portion of the foundation consists of cement-finished concrete that projects at an angle several inches downward from the base of the exterior wall until meeting a brick-faced vertical section that continues several more inches to the ground. The construction of the house is unusual in that the vertical supports are a series of two-and-a-half-inch-thick steel pipes, discreetly hidden from view, that run in east-west rows down the center of the house and along the exterior walls. This structural system allows for the expansive use of glass exterior walls.

The low-pitched gable roof of the main block of the house has boxed eaves that extend several feet out from the house on all sides. A screened vent runs along the inner edge of the soffit. The roof is supported by three I-beams encased in wood that run east-west and rest on the rows of structural steel pipes along the north and south sides of the house and down the center. These horizontal beams are cantilevered out from the body of the house the width of the east and west overhangs. The center beam is raised higher than the side beams, creating the low roof pitch. The gables are filled with plate glass panels. These features give the roof the appearance of floating above the walls of the house. The service wing roof has the same overhang as the main roof, but is flat. Both roofs are surfaced with built-up materials.

Facing the street, the west elevation is fronted with rough-cut native stone, laid in horizontal courses with random vertical joints. The plans and specifications indicate that originally this elevation and the interior chimney wall were to have been faced with brick. However, before construction the choice of brick was changed to stone. The type of stone has not been identified. The specifications simply call for native stone, though not crab orchard stone.

Tongue-and-groove boards set vertically and painted red sheathe the lower two thirds of the north elevation. The upper third consists of a horizontal band of three yellow-painted wood panels--one at the west end, one near the east end, and one near the center--between which are fixed and sliding glass windows. The main entrance to the house is located at the east end of this wall. It consists of a flush-panel, floor-to-ceiling, birch door with an east-flanking floor-to-

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ceiling translucent-glass panel. East of the service wing, the remainder of the north elevation is sheathed in full-height, red-painted, tongue-and-groove boards.

The service wing, projecting northward from the north elevation, is finished with the same red tongue-and-groove boarding. On the west side of the wing, a floor-to-ceiling flush-panel birch wood door opens to the laundry room. South of the door are two floor-to-ceiling, two-paneled windows. The lower halves are filled with fixed translucent glass, while the upper halves are filled with clear sliding glass. On the east side of the service wing, a double-leaf painted-wood door near the north end opens to a storage room. A wood-bordered glass door is positioned on the east side opposite the door on the west side of the wing. Between this door and the south end of the wing are two windows. The first is a small, sliding-glass, bathroom window set high on the wall. The second is an above-the-counter kitchen window that consists of a narrow fixed panel beneath sliding-glass panels.

The east elevation is divided into two halves. The north half is filled with a fixed plate-glass panel and a sliding glass panel. The south half is sheathed with the same painted-red wood as found elsewhere on the house exterior. A long, cantilevered, garden storage cabinet projects from the lower half of the wood section.

The south elevation is composed of a dramatic expanse of glass from one end to the other. This window wall consists of four pairs of sliding-glass doors and eight fixed panels of plate glass, all framed in aluminum.

A two-bay carport at the west end of the north elevation is attached to the house by four horizontal wood beams. The carport has a flat, boxed roof that is supported by nine four-inch steel pipes painted bright blue. The carport roof extends southward beneath the north eave of the house and then continues eastward in a narrow ell supported by an additional steel pole along the north side of the house, providing shelter for the walkway leading to the main entrance.

Interior

To supplement the interior description, see the attached architect's floor plan.

The house has an asymmetrical floor plan arranged so that the more public spaces--the entry, living room, dining room, and kitchen--are clustered at the east end of the house, while the more private areas, including three bedrooms, a multipurpose/sewing room, two bathrooms, and a dressing room, flank an east-west hall in the west half of the house. General characteristics of the interior of the house include the use of quality materials, almost all original, a light and airy feeling in most rooms, and a significant use of built-in storage.

Several materials are used for the flooring in the house. Multi-colored slate is used in the entry. The living and dining rooms, the north bedroom, and the hall bathroom are carpeted. The

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kitchen and laundry/work room are floored in vinyl (linoleum) tiles. Cork tiles cover the hall, the sewing room, the two south-side bedrooms, and the master dressing room. Small ceramic tiles floor the master bathroom.

Baseboards are one-and-a-half-inch-tall black vinyl. Many walls in the house are covered with birch plywood paneling. Those that are not are glass, sheet rock, stone (fireplace wall), and tile (bathrooms). Interior doors are flush-panel, hollow-core birch and are eight feet tall. Ceilings are sheet-rocked and, except in the hall and service wing, they slant upward to the center ridge beam. The exteriorly wood-boxed beams at the center and north and south sides of the house are exposed on the interior. In the kitchen, an original square dome skylight provides additional light.

The house also has numerous room-specific features of note. Except for the translucent glass wall next to the front door, the entry is entirely wood-paneled. A cantilevered shelf runs across part of the west wall, and a lighting cove runs above that wall.

A distinguishing feature of the living room is the stone fireplace wall, which uses the same stone as that used on the west façade of the house. Running the length of the stone wall are two cantilevered wood shelves above the central firebox and, beneath it, a cantilevered quarry-tile hearth. These features not only emphasize horizontality but appear to levitate. A cantilevered wood cabinet runs along the east wall of the living room, and three wood shelves run off-center along the wall above the cabinet. The west wall is sheathed in flush birch paneling. This wall incorporates panels that can slide across the openings to the sewing room and hall, thereby completely closing off the more private areas of the house from the communal areas when entertaining. The south wall of the living room is glass. East of the fireplace wall, the living room flows northward into the dining room.

The east wall of the dining room is glass. The west wall is paneled in birch, and the lower part of the wall has built-in cabinets. Above these, and beneath the kitchen cabinets on the opposite side of the wall, is a serving pass-through from the kitchen. Between the dining room and the kitchen is a birch wood swinging door.

The kitchen has birch paneling and built-in cabinets, an exposed section of the stone fireplace wall, and black formica counters. A wood room divider with built-in cabinets on both sides extends into the kitchen from the west wall, rising halfway to the ceiling and creating the feel of a hall between the doors to the dining room on the east and the entry on the west.

In the west half of the house, the bedrooms contain a considerable amount of birch wood paneling and built-in storage. Of particular interest, the built-in chests of drawers have drawer faces that each slant outward from top to bottom, much like the drawers in the 1949 Raleigh home of Henry Kamphoefner, then dean of the School of Design at North Carolina State University. The east wall of the multi-purpose/sewing room was designed with Lois Wheless in mind. Among its storage units are a wide door that hinges in the middle, opening out to expose a

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full-length mirror and a peg board. In addition to other storage within that cabinet, either side is lined with rows of slanted pegs to hold spools of thread. At the south end of the cabinet wall, a section of the paneling folds outward from the top to create a work table with a built-in panel that folds downward to provide a leg support.

Outbuildings

Three noncontributing outbuildings are located northeast of the service wing of the house. The largest outbuilding and the closest to the house is the workshop erected by Tom Wheless around 1970. Used for his woodworking projects, it is designed like the house, so that it gives the appearance of having been built at the same time. Its brick foundation extends out slightly from the body of the building. The walls are sheathed with vertical boards painted red. Windows have yellow painted panels beneath them. The widely overhanging roof slants slightly upward from north to south with the area between the walls and the roof being filled with glass. Roof support beams above the north and south walls extend outward to the edge of the roof eaves.

Northeast of the workshop is a small, gambrel-roofed, frame garden shed with door and windows at the south end. Painted red, the shed was added to the property ca. 2000.

East of the garden shed is a wood storage shed. Built ca. 1988, the rectangular frame building has a double-leaf loading door at the south end and a gable roof with widely overhanging eaves.

Integrity

The Wheless House is not only in excellent condition, but it is almost completely unaltered. The only changes have been the replacement of the bathroom sinks and kitchen appliances, some redecorating in the 1970s, and the replacement of the original wood privacy fence, also in the 1970s. Although the current privacy fence is composed of vertical boards rather than the horizontal boards used with the original, it maintains the same height and footprint that nearly encircles the property, thus retaining the overall feel of the original. As an outstanding example of mid-twentieth-century Modernism in residential design, the Wheless House retains a high degree of historic integrity in terms of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

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SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

When the School of Design was established at North Carolina State College (now University) in Raleigh in 1948, Dean Henry Kamphoefner saw to it that a group of modernist architects was added to the faculty and encouraged at least one other to come to the city to practice. These architects became, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, standard bearers for the Modern Movement in architecture, and their work affected the tenor of architectural design both in Raleigh and elsewhere in North Carolina during that time. One of these architects was G. Milton Small. Small had studied under Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in Chicago, and he became the foremost advocate of Miesian design in Raleigh and one the city's premier modernist architects of the mid-twentieth century.

Northeast of Raleigh, in the small town of Louisburg, Dr. Tom and Lois Wheless decided in the early 1950s to build a modern house. This was a very forward thinking and uncommon decision in a town filled with historic and otherwise traditional architecture. In March 1954, they selected G. Milton Small to design their house, and by August the house was under construction. Completed by the summer of 1955, it incorporated many design features and considerations typical of modernist residential design. The one-story house with low-pitched gable roof was built on a reinforced concrete slab foundation with hidden vertical steel poles providing the structural support for the walls. With a windowless stone façade but with garden walls composed of large expanses of glass, the house was designed both for privacy and for the integration of the indoors and outdoors. Careful detailing, an economy of space achieved through much built-in storage, the use of beautiful materials, and a masterful sense of balance characterize the house. Typically Modern, it was designed with a carport.

When it was built, the house was unlike any other in traditional Louisburg. Today, the well-preserved and little-altered house stands as an architectural icon of mid-twentieth-century Modernism in this northeastern Piedmont town. Because of its local architectural significance and because it is an excellent representative of the modernist work of Raleigh architect G. Milton Small, the Wheless House meets Criterion C for listing in the National Register. Its period of significance is 1955, the year in which the house was completed.

Historical Background and Architecture Context

The Thomas and Lois Wheless House is located in Louisburg, the county seat of rural Franklin County at the northeastern end of North Carolina's piedmont region. A small town with approximately 3,100 residents, Louisburg has served, since its establishment in 1779, as the

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political and trading center of the county. Architecturally, the town is known for its large collection of buildings dating from the late eighteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth century, as represented in the Louisburg Historic District (NR 1987) (Mason, 2, 10).

At the eastern edge of the historic district, the 1850s Williamson House (NR 1975) at 401 Cedar Street was originally accompanied by approximately ninety-five acres that spread out behind (east of) the house. For some years in the twentieth century, the county leased part of the Williamson property, which at that time consisted mostly of open fields, for the annual Franklin County Fair. However, after the death of Lela Williamson in 1948, the land was subdivided for residential development, and it was here, on newly laid out John Street, that the Wheless House was built. Around the same time as the sale of the Williamson property, the US 401/NC39 bypass, also known as Bickett Boulevard, was constructed around the eastern side of Louisburg, just east of the Wheless House site (Mason, 37; Ruedrich Interview; Wheless Family Interview).

On March 27, 1950, Tom and Lois Wheless purchased Lots 9-12 in Block D of the Williamson subdivision. Each of these lots was only twenty-five feet wide. Between March 8, 1954, and January 1, 1955, they acquired eight additional twenty-five-foot lots flanking their original four lots. The resulting tract was 300 feet wide and approximately 160 feet deep, a little more than one acre, that became the site of their new home (Deed Book 440, pp. 592-593; Deed Book 496, pp. 523-524; Deed Book 502, p. 279; Deed Book 524, p. 20).

The Whelesses were longtime prominent residents of Louisburg whose backgrounds and interests affected the house they chose to build. Thomas Omega Wheless (1918-2006), a native of Louisburg, was educated at Wake Forest College and Bowman Gray School of Medicine, where he was a member of the first graduating class. Returning to Louisburg, he was a family physician in the town from 1946 until his retirement in 1988. Tom's hobby was woodworking, and he built many pieces of furniture. A perfectionist, he had a love of good craftsmanship (Wheless Family Interview).

Lois Brown Wheless was a native of Rocky Mount. She spent her freshman year in college at Louisburg College and then transferred to the University of North Carolina Women's College (now UNC-G) in Greensboro, where she studied home economics. Lois was an expert seamstress and was known for her style and her great sense of good design. After college, she worked for a year as a designer for Rich's Department Store in Atlanta. In later years, she exercised her concern for good local government by serving on the Louisburg Town Council for thirty-eight years (1967-2005), longer than anyone else and longer than any woman on a town or city council in North Carolina (Wheless Family Interview).

Tom and Lois Wheless married in September of 1945. Initially they lived in his parents' home, but after a year or two they moved to an apartment, where they remained until building their own home in the mid 1950s. The Whelesses had two children (Wheless Family Interview).

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When the Whelesses began to think about building a house for themselves on their new property, Lois---always the individualist---knew that she wanted it to be modern. Tom agreed, but his vision was not as exacting as Lois's. One day he brought home a popular house magazine containing a picture of a ranch-style house that he liked. Lois, however, refused to consider it. She wanted something even more modern, and she wanted its design to be distinctive (Wheless Family Interview).

In deciding to build a modern house, the Whelesses were moving counter to the norm in Louisburg, which was filled with historic and otherwise traditional houses. Modernism in architecture was a concept that had not yet taken hold in the town. Only two known houses had ventured much beyond the traditional by the time the Whelesses built their house. The first of these was a Lustron house built ca. 1950 at the southeast corner of North Main and Justice streets. Although it represented a revolutionary, if short-lived, architectural turn in being pre-fabricated entirely of steel, its design was in keeping with post-war Minimal Traditional-style houses. The other house was built in the early 1950s for Dr. John Lloyd, the first surgeon at Louisburg's new hospital. Located at 103 Jolly Street, it was similar to the Wheless House in some respects, such as in its carport with a flat roof and pole supports, its use of stone veneer on at least a portion of the facade, and its low gable roof with widely overhanging eaves, projecting beams at the gable ends, and a triangle of glass covering half of one of the gables. However, the Lloyd House also made use of revivalist features in its diamond-muntined windows and a Spanish Colonial Revival-style paneled front door. Overall, the house does not exhibit the sophisticated design and modern unity possessed by the Wheless House. Later in the 1950s and thereafter, other houses in Louisburg tepidly began to exhibit more modern design elements, but none of these compares to the strong modernist statement of the Wheless House. [This analysis is based on the author's October 26, 2006, tour with Louis Wheless of all pre-1970 residential neighborhoods in Louisburg.]

With the new School of Design at North Carolina State University and the distinguished group of modernist architects drawn to it or to Raleigh by Dean Henry Kamphoefner, that nearby city became the center of modernist design in North Carolina during the 1950s and 1960s. This colored not only the architecture of Raleigh, but also spread fresh ideas in architectural design to other areas of the state. Nevertheless, while the new architectural vocabulary produced some dramatic houses, the patronage remained relatively elite, and Modernism never became the style of the masses (Black, National Register nomination for Early Modern Architecture in Raleigh, Section E-20). Thus, the architect-designed modernist houses of the 1950s, in particular, both in Raleigh and elsewhere in the state, serve as significant reminders of this important period in North Carolina's architectural history.

One of the prominent architects of the period was G. Milton Small. The Whelesses were already marginally acquainted with Small through mutual friends in Raleigh, and Lois's doctor

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recommended him as an architect who could design the type of house they wanted. Thus, the Whelesses selected Small as their architect (Wheless Family Interview).

George Milton Small Jr. (1916-1992) was, in fact, one of Raleigh's premier modernist architects of the mid-twentieth century. He received a B.Arch. and a B.S. in architectural engineering from the University of Oklahoma in 1939 and did graduate work in 1946-1947 at the Illinois Institute of Technology, where he studied under internationally renowned architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. In 1948, at the encouragement of Henry Kamphoefner, his former professor at the University of Oklahoma and the Dean of the newly established School of Design at North Carolina State College, Small moved to Raleigh to head the architecture office of William Henry Deitrick. During the late 1930s and 1940s, Deitrick was the most prolific proponent of modern architecture in North Carolina, although he also continued to produce historically influenced and traditional building designs. Disappointed that sufficient opportunities for modern design did not materialize in Deitrick's office, Small left the firm in 1949 to set up his own practice. During the winter term of 1951, he also was a part-time lecturer at the School of Design; later he served as President of the Design Foundation of the School of Design. Small brought to Raleigh and the School of Design a first-hand knowledge of the work of Mies van der Rohe, and in the 1950s and 1960s he became the foremost advocate of Miesian design in the area. During this time his commissions included several buildings on the North Carolina State University campus, Carter-Finley Stadium, the Raleigh Municipal Building, buildings on the Atlantic Christian College campus in Wilson, several churches, and numerous commercial buildings. Although Small was best known for his commercial and institutional projects, he also designed a number of residences, including his own. Among these, the Small House (1951, remodeled 1961) and the Mae and Philip Rothstein House (1959) are listed in the National Register (1994 and 2005, respectively). Built several years prior to the Wheless House, Small's own house was more strongly Miesian in design with its clear division into base, walls, and roof; flat roof with cantilevered eaves; and division of walls into glass and solid panels. The Rothstein House, built several years after the Wheless House, exhibits the same broad, low-pitched gable roof as the Wheless House, expanses of glass walls, boxed beams, and vertical pole supports. In 1963, Milton Small was made a fellow of the American Institute of Architects for his overall excellence in design (Black, National Register nomination for Early Modern Architecture in Raleigh, Section E-7, 9, 16, 31-33; Black, National Register nomination for Small House, Section 8-1; Gilliam, National Register nomination for Mae and Philip Rothstein House, Section 8-7, 8).

On March 29, 1954, the Whelesses signed a contract with Small for the architectural design of their house. Thirteen pages of drawings were completed by early June, and on July 2 the Whelesses entered into an agreement with the Mideastern Construction Company of Raleigh for the construction of the house according to Small's plans. The cost of construction was to be

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\$40,757. Edwin Gilbert Thurlow (1909-1997) was selected as the landscape architect. From 1947 to 1974 he was a professor of landscape architecture at North Carolina State University (Architecture Agreement; Architecture Plans; Constuction Agreement; Landscape Plans; Thurlow Biographical Notes).

In designing the Wheless House, Milton Small incorporated many design features and considerations that were typical of those used by the Raleigh modernist architects. Interestingly, these features combined design tenets of both Mies van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright (in his Usonian houses), whose work differed greatly from each other visually. Miesian features of the Wheless House include the use of innovative construction techniques, the integration of indoors and outdoors through large expanses of glass, the selective use of rich interior finishes such as native stone, multi-colored slate, cork, and birch wood, and careful attention to detail. Features of Wright's Usonian houses that can be seen in the Wheless House include a private street side and an open garden side, a carport rather than a garage, a concrete slab foundation, widely overhanging roof eaves, efficient use of space with large amounts of built-in storage, use of wood and local stone, a spacious living room with a fireplace forming the heart of the house, a kitchen open to the dining area, and bedrooms arranged along a linear hallway at the end of the house opposite the living room (Black, National Register nomination for Early Modern Architecture in Raleigh, Section E-11, 12).

Work on the house began in August 1954, when the foundation was laid. In September, the roof was under construction. By December, the exterior was largely in place, and the carport was being erected. The house--a one-story L-shaped structure of approximately 2,500 square feet with wood, glass, and native stone walls and a low gable roof with triangles of glass at each gable end and widely overhanging eaves--was completed by July of 1955. However, the landscape remained barren, and it was several years before it had taken shape and the house looked comfortably settled on its large site. By the time the house was finished, change orders had raised its cost approximately \$5,000 to a total of \$45,699.72 (Wheless Family Photos; Certificate of Payment).

While the house was under construction, Tom Wheless was fascinated with the engineering aspects of how it was built. Lois Wheless, on the other hand, was more interested in the design aspects of how the house was going to look and function. Both had ample opportunity to find satisfaction. Tom was intrigued particularly with the foundation and the structural system of the house. Typical of modernist houses of the period, the house was built with a concrete slab foundation. Here, however, it was reinforced with steel I-beams, allowing for the incorporation of a crawl space beneath the slab for access to plumbing. Unlike other house construction of the time, the house was built with no conventional load-bearing walls. Instead, it was supported by a system of steel poles, like those of the carport, that ran down the center of the house and along the north and south sides, all discreetly hidden from view. This allowed for the expansive use of

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glass exterior walls and the “floating” roof. In addition, the house was built with central air conditioning, believed to be its first residential use in Louisburg (Louis Wheless Interview; Wheless Family Interview).

Lois Wheless found that the house was built with a great sense of privacy, space, light, balance, and materials. Instead of being oriented toward the street, the façade was sheathed with native stone with no windows except the triangle of glass filling the low gable of the roof. The north side facing the carport and the walk leading to the main, side, entrance was treated with a vertical-board wall with a row of horizontal windows high on the wall. However, the east and south elevations were filled largely with glass that looked out upon what would become the garden. Additionally, a tall redwood fence extended southward from the façade and continued around the sides and rear of the property. The interior was designed for both entertaining, with the flowing spaces of the common areas, and for privacy, with a bedroom wing that could be closed off completely from the common areas by sliding wood panels. There was also an economy of space in what was not a particularly large house in the use of a great array of built-in storage throughout the house. The interior took on a light and airy feeling because of the extensive use of glass walls and because of the low-pitched ceiling and roof that seemed almost to float above the rest of the house due to the triangles of glass filling each gable end. Finally, the house was aesthetically compelling in large part because of an extraordinary sense of balance in its particular use of horizontal, vertical, and spatial elements and because of the materials used: from the beautiful veneered wood paneling, cabinets, and doors throughout the house; native stone for the façade and fireplace walls; slate, cork, linoleum, and ceramic tile floors; and the walls of glass that formed “voids” balancing the “solids” of the other materials.

As construction of the house progressed, attention turned to its furnishings. Milton Small wrote letters of introduction for the Whelesses to the top modern furniture showrooms in New York. Traveling to the city, they purchased furniture from such well-known firms as Knoll Associates, Herman Miller, George Nelson, and the Heifetz Company. Thus, to complement their modernist house, the Whelesses filled it with period-appropriate furniture (Wheless Family Interview; Small Letter; Wheless Account Book).

When the house was completed, it was unlike any other in Louisburg. According to the Wheless family, the one-story house was, in fact, a curiosity. People driving down the US 401/NC 39 Bypass east of the house could see it clearly, since at that time the landscape of trees and shrubbery had not yet grown to block its view. Not being familiar with modern houses, some thought it was a new restaurant or grocery (Wheless Family Interview).

Over time, the house has fared well. Changes have been minimal, including the replacement of bathroom sinks and appliances and partial redecorating in the 1970s. Also in the 1970s, the original wood privacy fence around the house was replaced with a wood fence of the same height and footprint. The landscape has matured, converting what was originally a barren

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field to a lush private retreat with curvilinear lawns, shrubbery, and wooded areas with sycamore, birch, dogwood, pine, holly, and magnolia trees. Three frame outbuildings have been added north and northeast of the house. The first, a shop for Dr. Wheless's woodworking, was erected in the 1970s but looks as if it could have been built simultaneously with the house because it echoes its form and detailing. The other two outbuildings include a small building for wood storage, built ca. 1988, and a small garden shed built ca. 2000 (Louis Wheless Interview).

For half a century, Tom and Lois Wheless owned and occupied the house. Through the years it served their family well and, appreciating its distinctive quality, they have maintained its integrity. When it was built, the house was a curiosity of modern architecture in traditional Louisburg. Today it stands as an architectural icon of mid-twentieth-century Modernism in this northeastern Piedmont town.

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GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is defined as Lot 135 on Louisburg Map 27 (Franklin County Tax Record #18734).

Boundary Justification

The boundary of the nominated property encompasses a tract of approximately one acre that constitutes the historic and current property associated with the Thomas and Lois Wheless House.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information for numbers 1-5 applies to all nomination photographs:

- 1) Thomas and Lois Wheless House
- 2) Louisburg, Franklin County, North Carolina
- 3) Laura A. W. Phillips
- 4) October 26, 2006
- 5) CD: NCHPO, Raleigh
- 6-7) 1: Street setting, view to NE
- 2: Façade (west elevation), view to SE
- 3: North elevation, view to SE
- 4: Garden and service wing, view to E
- 5: Outbuildings (workshop, garden shed, and wood shed), view to SE
- 6: Service wing and east end of house, view to SW
- 7: East and south elevations, view to NW
- 8: South and west elevations, view to NE
- 9: Entry, view to NE
- 10: Living room fireplace wall and west wall of dining room, view to NW
- 11: Kitchen, view to S
- 12: Dining room and living room, east end of house, view to S