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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *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 an 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 listed in 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 Usonia Historic District

other names/site number Usonia Homes: A Cooperative, Inc.; Usonia Homes Incorporated

2. Location

street & number Usonia Road, Laurel Hill Drive, Orchard Brook Drive, Rocky Vale Road, et al not for publication

city or town Pleasantville vicinity

state New York code NY county Westchester code 119 zip code 10570

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I 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.

Ruth Purpont DBHPO 7/11/12
Signature of certifying official/Title 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 certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper
Alexis A. Kennedy

Date of Action
9/5/12

Usonia Historic District

Name of Property

Westchester County, New York

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	
43	9	buildings
1	0	sites
3	0	structures
0	0	objects
47	9	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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwellings

DOMESTIC/single dwellings

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Wood, stone

roof

other

Narrative Description

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

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Usonia Historic District
Pleasantville, Westchester County, NY

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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The Usonia Historic District is located in northeastern Westchester County, near the New York-Connecticut border. The district is in the town of Mount Pleasant, almost due north of the Kensico Reservoir. The surrounding suburban communities of Armonk, Pleasantville, Thornwood, and Chappaqua all developed prior to Usonia's purchase of the land. The district is generally bordered by Bear Ridge Road on the north and Nanny Hagen Road on the south, and there are entrances to Usonia from both roads. The eastern border is formed by NY 120 (King Street), from which there is another entrance to the community. The boundaries to the south and east are protected by the large Kensico Watershed; however, some development has occurred just outside the western boundary and is visible from the far western edge of the district. The nomination boundary was drawn to encompass the original ninety-seven-acre site purchased in 1946 and one additional building lot added in 1959. The district is long and narrow, roughly rectangular in shape, with the longer sides forming the east and west boundaries and the shorter sides serving as the north and south boundaries. At the time of the purchase, the original parcel was bounded by a large estate and farms to the west and on all other sides by the pine watershed that provided a permanent greenbelt.¹ As purchased, the site was composed of wooded and hilly land complete with, "pleasant little brooks, fine old trees as well as much new growth, stone fences that are remnants of ancient farms, and abundant small wildlife."² The site was subsequently overlain with the site plan designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for Usonia Homes: A Cooperative, Inc. (slightly revised by David Henken with Wright's approval). Although Wright's plan laid out roads and identified building lots and community spaces, it also preserved much of the original topography, geology, and vegetation. In addition to the plan (one contributing site), the nomination includes forty-six contributing features constructed between 1949 and 1964. Both plan and architecture retain an outstanding level of integrity.

¹ Priscilla Henken, "A Broadacre Project," *Town & Country Planning*, vol. 22 (June 1955), 294-300.

² Ibid.

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The topography of the site ranges from a low point of 82' to a high point of 290,' with the lowest land at the southern end of the site, near the reservoir, and the highest point on the northwest end along Bear Ridge.³ The landscape itself is densely wooded and various rock-outcroppings are present. Native plant material has been allowed to grow unaltered, and the result is a healthy dosage of laurel, ferns, and other dense shrubbery. In general, two major north-south routes traverse the site, following its contours and wrapping around the original circular-shaped building lots. All roads are narrow with densely wooded sides growing right up to the edge in most instances. Usonia Road, which runs north-south from Nanny Hagen Road to Bear Ridge Road, is the main thoroughfare through the community and is connected to every lesser road, with the exception of Orchard Brook Drive, which links to Usonia Road via Laurel Hill Drive. In the northern half of the district, Usonia is characterized by relatively straight segments of road, with Usonia Drive and Orchard Brook Drive stretching out to meet Bear Ridge Road and King Street, respectively, from an intersection mid-plan. In the southern portion, the plan features a loop produced by both Usonia Road and Bayberry Drive, the latter of which terminates where it meets Usonia Road to its north. As Usonia Road progresses north, it intersects with Rocky Vale Road, Wright Way, and Hemlock Drive. Just above Hemlock Drive, Usonia Road splits at a fork, creating Laurel Hill Drive, a dead-end street, which connects to Orchard Brook Drive.

As originally laid out by Wright in 1947, Usonia had fifty-five circular building sites, each one acre in size, or 200' in diameter. Lots were arranged in clusters of six that surrounded common land, and some circles were part of multiple clusters. Because Wright originally aligned his circles in uneven rows, the spaces between the circles (or the building lots) were triangular in shape. Wright intended that these spaces remain undeveloped and serve as communal land. After the community reviewed Wright's initial plan, it was slightly revised by David Henken and Aaron Resnick, with Wright's approval, to eliminate several undesirable building lots and

³ John Michael Desmond, "A Clearing in the Woods: Self & City in Frank Lloyd Wright's Organic Communities," PhD. dissertation, MIT, 1996, 480.

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better align the roads with the topography. The revised plan had fifty, slightly larger lots, each 217' in diameter. Several years later, after the community had begun to build, the cooperative secured a mortgage. In order to appease bank surveyors, Henken and Resnick modified the lots as polygons. Although this change affected the plan on paper, it did not change the layout or appearance of the community in any way, as owners continued to build within the circular building sites and maintain the uncleared land between in common. In 1955, the plan was revised again when the community transferred building lots from cooperative to private ownership. At this time, many of the original triangular-shaped parcels between lots were incorporated into individual parcels. Again, however, this change was not observable in the physical fabric of the community, which continued to maintain the circular building sites. Today, the community consists of forty-seven residential lots, each exactly 1.25 acres, with one exception (the lot added in 1959 is 1.75 acres). They are distributed relatively evenly throughout the site. Property lines are blended together, due to the forbiddance of fences by the cooperative board and the prevalence of native plantings, and in most cases it is impossible to determine where one property ends and another begins. As Wright intended, each homeowner occupies a lot that is surrounded by vegetation and by other home sites, enjoying both individuality and community. Homeowners have generally planted low groundcovers (such as ivy or pachysandra), bushes and wildflowers, although several have small grassy lawns, and at least one has terraced plantings interspersed with sculpture. Several have in-ground pools, well screened from the community. The remaining forty acres of land, including the roads, are owned and maintained by the cooperative. The public land also includes a pool and tennis courts at the southern edge of the community and the remains of the stone pump house, the first structure completed on the site, which is missing its roof.

The homes built on these lots are almost all set back from the road, in varying locations on each property, and constructed within the circular building sites that Wright identified. Although houses are almost all visible from the community road, each is also secluded and intimate. As Wright had recommended, individual houses were

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oriented so that each had extensive private views, particularly for the spaces reserved for family uses, such as living rooms and terraces. Wright's plan also took advantage of the topography to site houses at different elevations, further concealing their private spaces from each other. Because of their siting, vegetation, long, low form and use of natural materials, including native stone and horizontal cypress siding, the buildings blend almost seamlessly into the site.

The first residence was completed in 1949 and the last (of the original residences) in 1964. The first five houses were distributed with three homes in the central part of the community and two to the south. Twelve houses were constructed in 1949, most clustered in the center of the community, while thirteen were built in 1950. The latter residences were somewhat evenly dispersed from north to south. Those were the two most productive years for building, accounting for just over half of the total number of residences. Smaller numbers were built in the other years, ranging from two to four, and these were dispersed fairly evenly throughout the parcel. The majority were built before 1955.

Almost all of the original forty-seven residences were designed by Frank Lloyd Wright or his disciples. Wright himself designed three residences, while community founder and former Taliesin apprentice David Henken designed thirteen. Another thirteen were designed by Aaron Resnick, an architect and another Usonia member who served with Henken on the cooperative's design panel. Other buildings were designed by architects Ted Bower, Kaneji Domoto, Schweikher & Elting, George Nemeny, Ulrich Franzen and Warner and Leeds.

House designs show a great deal of individuality and most were designed according to Wright's principles of organic architecture. As Wright prescribed for the Usonian house, almost all rest on concrete slabs, feature radiant, in-floor heating, massive masonry chimneys, flat roofs with deeply overhanging eaves, are constructed of concrete, stone (or brick) and horizontal cypress siding, long bands of windows, mitered and clerestory

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windows, and effect a close relationship between indoor and outdoor space. Almost all have some kind of a terrace, unusually sheltered by a deep eave or an extension of the roof plane. Many designs incorporate cantilevers. As per Wright's example, many have carports and there are few garages. Some buildings have been built into their steeply sloping sites, thus providing at least one extremely protected elevation, and, at the same, time, another elevation that is completely open. Interiors feature open plans with central living room/kitchen/dining areas and bedrooms in separate wings. Much of the furniture is built in and interior finishes make extensive use of wood, masonry, and glass. Even those houses that cannot be called Usonian, such as the several examples that reflect more conventional trends in modern architecture, or those that failed to adhere to Wright's prescription for flat roofs or horizontal siding, still embody long, low forms, provide a sense of privacy for their occupants, and are sited to blend with the landscape.

Integrity

Most of Usonia's residences retain an outstanding level of integrity to their period of construction. Changes and additions, where made, have been done in keeping with the original architectural character of the community. The most common change is the addition or extension of a wing to accommodate a growing family, and numerous houses have compatible wings, some of which were anticipated in the original design. A few houses have been remodeled in ways that substantially compromised their original designs. Ironically, the most significant change to the district is not apparent. Several houses have been demolished and rebuilt, for various reasons, on their original sites and using their original plans. Although these reconstructions are less than fifty years only and do not contribute to the significance of the district, they, nevertheless, do not compromise it in any way.

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Building List

This list is arranged alphabetically, by street address. Site numbers in parenthesis refer to Usonia site numbers (see map). All resources are contributing unless otherwise noted.

3 Bayberry Drive (Site 42) Lew House; 1951; Architect: Schweikher & Elting

one-story, long, rectilinear residence; low pitched gabled roof with deeply overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab and horizontal cypress siding; southwest corner is marked by a cypress covered chimney; south elevation has an exposed ground floor below a cantilevered terrace; carport addition with low pitched roof extends from east elevation; in ground pool outside south elevation is surrounded by a wooden fence; beyond the pool, further south on the property, is wooden tree house.

4 Bayberry Drive (Site 45) Masson House; 1951; Architect: David Henken; Addition 2006

one-story L-shaped residence set into sloping hillside, so that front elevation has a garage entrance cut into hill, and rear elevation exposes basement level; constructed of a brick foundation and horizontal cypress siding; flat roof with overhanging eaves; windows extending up to the eaves; a soaring triangular carport extends out from front façade. The rear façade has an extending wing; room with floor to ceiling windows at end and with a large deck. The 2006 remodeling has extensively changed the character of the original Masson house, as well as greatly enlarged the square feet. **NON-CONTRIBUTING**

6 Bayberry Drive (Site 52) Aaron Resnick House; 1949; Architect: Aaron Resnick

one-story polygonal residence; flat roof with overhanging eaves; facade set into a steeply sloping hill; façade is accessed by steps to a below-grade entrance and is accented by bands of clerestory windows; constructed of concrete slab, beige painted horizontal cypress siding, and red brick; a long wing, also set into the sloping hillside, extends south, which is the rear; on south elevation the entire first story is exposed and opens up to patio off the main living spaces; the rear elevation is marked by a wide brick chimney; appears to be an addition next to chimney; carport at the driveway level is connected to a trellised path to the house entrance

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7 Bayberry Drive (Site 51) Sidney Benzer House, 1949; Architect Aaron Resnick

one-story rectangular residence; flat roof with overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab, brick and horizontal cypress siding; large carport extends off of west elevation, sheltering entrance; clerestory windows visible from west elevation; south elevation is marked by floor to ceiling windows in living room, which extends to patio bounded by a half-height brick wall to the south, with 4' by 4' concrete floor extended from living room; southeast end of south elevation has screened porch set into sloping hill so that it is elevated above grade; east elevation has exposed ground floor level; small shed with horizontal cypress siding on north end.

8 Bayberry Drive (Site 53) Bier House, 1949: Architect: Kaneji Domoto

one-story, T-shaped residence; built into a sloping hillside, so that southern elevation is cantilevered over the sloping site; built of concrete slab and concrete block; flat roof with deeply overhanging eaves originally extended over the living room, where it became an open, grid-like awning sheltering a terrace. The building has been altered with the application of vertical cypress siding over the concrete and the original living room has been expanded to include the terrace, now enclosed with glass; other alterations include enclosure of a carport on the east side of the dwelling; despite alterations, form remains completely intact.

10 Bayberry Drive (Site 55) Hirsch House, 1960; Architect David Leavitt

one-story rectangular residence; flat roof with overhanging eaves supported by black timber beams; constructed of concrete slab, vertical cypress siding, and fieldstone; square carport marks eastern elevation; white plastic and aluminum screen extends off carport to north; entry to residence is past carport and screen to terraced courtyard; courtyard has a slate floor and inset slate table and seats; north and south elevations have clerestory windows at eave base; south elevation has deck extension accessed via glass sliding doors; south elevation is marked by a central fieldstone wall that juts out perpendicularly and is the extension of interior fireplace; residence is not Usonian in style but blends well into its site and is compatible

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Bayberry Drive: Tennis Courts, built 1960; swimming pool and small pump house designed by Aaron Resnick

750 Bear Ridge Road (Site 57) Samuel Resnick House; 1958, Architect: Aaron Resnick

two-story rectangular residence; set on top of a narrow hill, which slopes away at the rear of the house; flat roof with overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab, concrete block and red stained horizontal siding; at the southern end of the house is a circular, domed, room, which features the living spaces and a central hearth; at the rear eastern elevation is an extended patio with unique sculptural trellising.

2 Hemlock Drive (Site 33) Hillesum House, 1951; Architect: Aaron Resnick

one-story rectangular residence; flat roof with overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab, concrete block and horizontal cypress paneling; north elevation has recessed entrance; the overhanging eave that surrounds the entire house, creates a covered entrance; the rear façade has band of rectangular windows

1010 King Street (Site 1) Paul Benzer House, 1958; Architect: Aaron Resnick

one-story rectangular residence sited at the end of a steeply ascending driveway; gradually pitched roof with deeply overhanging eaves, constructed of concrete slab, concrete block and vertical cypress siding; exposed basement at the southeast elevation; cantilevered extension with sloping roof and large windows; central hearth.

1 Laurel Hill Drive (Site 23) Caro House, 1956; Architect: Aaron Resnick

two-story long, rectilinear residence with a flat roof, constructed of concrete slab, concrete block, and horizontal cypress siding. Built into a steep hillside so that the entrance on the northwest elevation is actually at the second story and the southeast and eastern elevations expose a ground story. Expansive deck runs along southeast elevation. Sliding glass doors open out to the yard at the ground floor level; side elevations feature battered sides and rectilinear fenestration

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2 Laurel Hill Drive (Site 18) Brandon House, 1949; Architect: David Henken; addition, c1950s; Architect: Aaron Resnick

one-story long, low, L-shaped residence; flat roof and clerestory windows; constructed of concrete slab and horizontal cypress siding; the building is set into the gently sloping hill so that a terrace on the south elevation appears to be slightly below grade. The single story plan is divided into two wings, separating bedroom and living spaces. The northwest elevation of the bedroom wing is a saw tooth form composed mostly of windows and terminating in what was originally a studio space. The living room area was expanded by architect Aaron Resnick after the original building date.

3 Laurel Hill Drive (Site 19) Kepler House, 1949; Architect: David Henken

one-story residence with a flat roof, constructed of concrete slab and horizontal cypress siding and set into steep slope (check) so that the south elevation exposes a ground floor level. Character defining features include roof trellises, terracing off the southern elevation and clerestory windows.

4 Laurel Hill Drive (Site 13) Site of Jerry Podell House; 1959; Architect: David Henken; Addition, 1999; Architect: Peter Gluck. Destroyed by fire 2010; concrete shell of Gluck addition remains.

NON-CONTRIBUTING

5 Laurel Hill Drive (Site 22) Ralph Miller House, 1949; Architect: David Henken; rebuilt c2000

one-story residence with a flat roof constructed primarily of horizontal cypress siding with concrete slab. The southeast elevation is defined by a "saw tooth" formation. This house was built in 1949; however, in c2000 the majority of it was razed and rebuilt according to the original plan. The oldest portion of the home is currently a living room addition added by Aaron Resnick to the southwestern side. **NON-CONTRIBUTING**

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7 Laurel Hill Drive (Site 21) Harry Miller House; 1952; Architect: George Nemeny
one-story cross-shaped residence; flat roof with thin extended eave on all elevations; constructed of concrete slab, concrete block and grey vertical cypress siding; original steel casements restored and replaced; house is situated on a hill top, with garage set into the landscape at the front, northwest, elevation; rear southern elevation has an enclosed patio opening up to pool.

12 Laurel Hill Drive (Site 28) Serlin House; 1951; Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright; addition 1997; Architect: Tobias Guggenheimer
one-story, rectangular residence with perpendicular wing (addition) extending from rear façade; flat roof with sweeping overhangs extending from façade over glass enclosed main rooms; constructed of concrete slab, fieldstone and cypress; windows and doors open to terrace with extensive views to the front and wooded landscape behind; large fieldstone fireplace; small garage with cypress siding on the west end of the property.

2 Orchard Brook Drive (Site 3) Tamlyn House, 1953; Architect: Aaron Resnick
one-story, long, rectilinear residence; low pitched roof; constructed of concrete slab, concrete block and dark stained horizontal cypress siding. North and south elevations are long and contain many windows. North elevation has battered wall above concrete block towards eastern end. A deck stretches out from north elevation just past battered segment. South elevation is predominantly floor to ceiling windows and doors, opening to flat patio space. A concrete block chimney rises up from the center of the home. Entrance is at west elevation, just south of an attached carport. A stream runs through the northwest corner of the property.

7 Orchard Brook Drive (Site 8) Brody House, 1951; Architect: David Henken
one-story low, circular residence; inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's Friedman House; constructed of concrete slab and red concrete block; house has a flat roof and clerestory windows flanking the curved walls. The plan

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revolves around a central living space, with three extending wings terminating in circular ends. The entrance is located via the carport on the northwestern elevation; small detached greenhouse northwest of entrance

8 Orchard Brook Drive (Site 11) Kahn House; 1962; Architect: Aaron Resnick

one-story rectilinear residence; flat roof with overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab, horizontal cypress siding and concrete block, set into a steep hillside, so that northwest elevation is cantilevered over a carport. Entrance is via stairs under carport up to main level. A deck wraps around this main level at north, south and west elevations, which are mostly glass, including floor to ceiling windows and doors at the eastern end of the north elevation. A large concrete block fireplace flanks the center wall of the living room space.

9 Orchard Brook Drive (Site 12) Grayson House, 1955, Architect: Tobias Goldstone; Addition, 1975; Architect: Aaron Resnick

one-story rectilinear residence; flat roof with overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab and vertical cypress siding; cypress framed glass along south side; large stone fireplace; finished lower level with glass wall opening to flagstone terrace; addition on north side with vertical cypress siding and clerestory windows

11 Orchard Brook Drive (Site 14) Friedman House, 1950; Architect: Frank Lloyd Wright

two-story residence composed of two overlapping cylinders, constructed on a circular module and built of concrete slab and fieldstone. The larger cylinder is two stories high and contains the "usonian core" with living areas, and the smaller contains a bedroom wing, with a cantilevered terrace over the living room space. The walls of the home are battered ashlar masonry and the roof on each cylinder is circular with overhanging eaves. A stone wall runs from the residence north to a concrete circular carport supported by a central stem.

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6 Rocky Vale Road (Site 44) Leslie Resnick, 1997; Architect: Peter Wiederspahn

one-story rectangular house; concrete of concrete slab and horizontal cypress siding; concrete block fireplace; glass doors, windows and overhanging balcony/terrace along entire south side Note: This building was constructed on the site of the Auerbach residence, designed by Aaron Resnick; built 1951; demolished 1997

NON-CONTRIBUTING

1 Usonia Rd (Site 58) Berman House, 1957; Addition: 1994; Architect: Ulrich Franzen

one-story square residence; flat roof overhangs front elevation creating a porch; constructed of concrete slab and vertical cypress siding. The house was built into a sloping hillside, so that ground floor is exposed on the north elevation; rectangular windows. Site is elevated from road, with sweeping driveway and stone wall leading up to residence and garage at northern end of property. Additions in 1994 include outdoor terrace, wall, planters at south end of house; treehouse northwest of entrance

2 Usonia Road (Site 4) Milner House, 1952; Architect: David Henken; Additions 1971, 1979, 1993; Architect: Aaron Resnick

one-story polygonal residence; flat roof with overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab and horizontal cypress siding. House is built into a steep slope at the west elevation, so that the entrance is below grade and the residence's roof is at driveway level. Concrete wall extends towards carport, off of west elevation. East elevation has a terraced deck off the main living space, with ground floor exposed beneath. Southeast elevation has a sharply angled mitered window and overhanging angled eave, which extends along the east elevation until it sharply angles out again at the northeast elevation. Additions to original structure include an extension of the living room at the east elevation and bedroom addition at the west elevation that replaced the original carport (1971). A kitchen addition to the northeast elevation replaced the original kitchen (1979). Detached carport/studio (**non-contributing**) was added in 1993

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4 Usonia Road (Site 5) Parker House, 1952, Architect: Warner and Leeds

one-story polygonal residence; flat roof with overhanging eaves; composed of two main wings extending to the south and west; constructed of concrete slab, fieldstone, synthetic paneling, cypress and copper; the roof has a wide fascia, suggested by Frank Lloyd Wright to add "solidity;" one elevation is set into a hillside so that windows at mid-wall appear at grade; north end of house was recently extended seven feet.

6 Usonia Road (Site 6) Anderson House, 1951; Architect: David Henken

one-story, polygonal residence; flat roof with overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab, concrete block and horizontal cypress siding; features clerestory windows; angular pergola; triangular cantilevered deck and angled deck railing incorporating a continuous bench

8 Usonia Rd (Site 9) Scheinbaum House, 1951; Architect: Ted Bower ; addition 1955; Architect: David Henken; Remodel, 2000

one-story polygonal residence; flat roof and dome with skylight towards north elevation; constructed of concrete slab, concrete block and cypress siding; large terrace. Original structure had carport at southwest elevation extending off of open plan living/workspace area. Bedroom addition at north and living room enlarged with added fireplace by David Henken extends south. Completely remodeled in 2000. Most of the western section as well as the iconic dome remain, and additional block and fenestration match the original; however, the original design has been lost **NON-CONTRIBUTING**

10 Usonia Road (Site 10) Silver House, 1952, Architect: David Henken

one-story polygonal house; pitched roof; constructed of concrete slab, concrete block (recently coated with stucco) on west elevation and horizontal cypress siding elsewhere; next to driveway and entry a long detached perforated concrete block wall adds privacy to indoor-outdoor living areas

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16 Usonia Road (Site 16) Robertson House, 1952, Architect: David Henken

one-story rectangular residence; built into a sloping hillside so that the front (west) elevation is below grade, and multi-level rear elevation is above grade; flat roof, multiple planes, with overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab, light colored brick and horizontal painted gray siding; combination of small rectangular windows and floor to ceiling windows and doors (the latter on the rear); massive brick chimney marks center of the façade; stone sidewalk and patio; detached carport and new driveway (Joseph Palumbo, architect)

17 Usonia Road (Site 17) Siegel House, 1956, Architect: Kaneji Domoto

one-story angular residence; unique, asymmetrically pitched roof; west elevation set into a sloping hillside so that the gradually pitched roof's eave terminates a foot above the ground; constructed of concrete slab, vertical cypress siding and fieldstone; façade (north elevation) has a projecting carport with a similarly pitched roof; roofs have corrugated sheeting; rear (south) elevation is marked by a central fieldstone fireplace flanked by triple sliding glass doors, which open to a patio, and pool; rear landscaped rock garden designed by Domoto

19 Usonia Road (Site 24) Wax House, 1950; Additions: 1950s, 1963, 1968; Architect: Aaron Resnick

one-story polygonal residence; flat roof with overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab, fieldstone and Cherokee red cypress siding. Sited on top of a hill so that all elevations appear at similar grade. The east elevation (front) is an asymmetrical "U" shape, with the entrance offset to the southern end of the center portion. A garage exists on the northeast end of the structure, and at the southeast a pavilion with glass doors opens to a patio space and open yard extending south. The east elevation is flanked by a massive stone chimney and this stonework is echoed on the west elevation.

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23 Usonia Road (Site 32) Podell House; 1949; Addition 1962; Architect: David Henken

one-story, multi-level residence; flat roof; clerestory windows, constructed of concrete slab, corbelled concrete block and cypress siding. On the southwest elevation a patio is accessible via a wall of glass doors, and an angular sculptural element is formed over the area by an extension (pergola) off the roof; features mitered windows and studio addition by Henken, 1962. This is one of David Henken's first attempts at a Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian home and also one of the most intact of his designs within the community

24 Usonia Road (Site 25) Millman House, 1957; Architect: Techbuil; addition 1983; Architect: David Henken; rebuilt 1998

one-story residence; steeply pitched gable roof supported on large beams; adjacent steeper gable shelters carport; originally a Techbuilt house, this house was extensively remodeled by David Henken in 1983, incorporating Usonian material, including horizontal cypress siding stone and red concrete radiant flooring. In 1998 the house was completely rebuilt, retaining most of the original Henken design. **NON-CONTRIBUTING**

26 Usonia Road (Site 26) Harris House, 1949; Architect: Kaneji Domoto

one-story L-shaped residence; constructed of concrete slab, fieldstone and horizontal cypress siding; projecting ell on façade is all glass, broken by characteristic Domoto arbor forming upper clerestory sheltered by sloping shed roof; fieldstone chimney at southern end of elevation breaks the span of the shed roof's span. Property is set far back from the road and accessed via a winding driveway; originally very similar to the Domoto-designed Lurie house, the Harris house is slightly larger and has had minor additions over the years

27 Usonia Road (Site A; added to Usonia in 1969) Bier II House, 1969, Architect : Pre-FAB

one-story residence composed of three connected polygonal pre-fab units; constructed of concrete slab, concrete block and vertical cypress siding; shallow pyramidal roofs; horizontal windows; extensive patio/deck extends off south elevation; also has a similarly designed garage and an in-ground pool.

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28 Usonia Road (Site 31) Lurie House; 1949; Architect: Kaneji Domoto

one-story L-shaped residence; constructed of concrete, fieldstone, and horizontal cypress siding; projecting ell on façade is all glass, broken by characteristic Domoto arbor to creating a patio space; enormous flat roof cantilevers above it; adjacent recessed part of façade has same design; large fieldstone chimney

29 Usonia Road (Site 43) Silson House, 1951 , Architect: Kaneji Domoto

one-story square residence; flat roof with deep overhanging eaves resting on over-scaled beams; in some places the beams carry trellising rather than roof; constructed of concrete slab, concrete block and cream and brown stucco with cypress accents; the south elevation has an projecting glass-enclosed patio; the north and west elevations extend over a sloping hillside, and a patio is cantilevered out off of the residence east elevation; entrance is marked by a cantilevered carport with domed skylights; roof above the carport has an arched detail; residence exhibits Japanese influence

30 Usonia Road (Site 30) Sidney Miller House, 1951, Architect: Aaron Resnick

two-story, multi-component main block with long one-story wing extending towards rear of the property; flat roof with multiple planes and overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab, horizontal green-gray painted cypress siding and red brick

31 Usonia Road (Site 37) Glass House, 1951, Architect, Ted Bower; Various additions, most recent in 2008

two-story rectangular residence; constructed of steel, glass, concrete and wood; façade has three stepped, rectangular components with floor to ceiling glass windows and doors; flat roof, overhanging eaves, wide frieze; rear has small windows at frieze and a lower level; stone walkway and patio; retains its original stone retaining wall; original form remains but exterior design of the house has been substantially altered with contemporary pergola over entrance; **NON-CONTRIBUTING**

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38 Usonia Road (Site 29) Victor House, 1951; Architect Aaron Resnick; Addition, 2005 by Peter Wiederspahn one-story rectangular residence; flat roof with overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab, brick, and horizontal cypress siding. The south elevation boasts a living room wing with floor to ceiling windows; moving east along the front elevation a vertical band of windows spans the upper portion of the center front elevation, terminating in a carport. Strong vertical and horizontal lines characterize the home, as do clerestory windows. An addition was added to the northwest elevation in 2005.

39 Usonia Road (Site 39) Zais House, 1955; Architect: Techbuilt; Addition: unknown date, by Morton Delson one-story residence; low-pitched gable roof over most of structure; cross gable with deep overhanging eaves resting on exposed beams shelters main living room, which has floor to ceiling windows and deck; carport at north elevation; constructed of concrete slab and horizontal cypress siding. Original small Techbuilt house is the cross-gabled section to the west; large, rectangular two-story addition with massive brick fireplace is adjacent; house is set into a steep hill so that south elevation has exposed ground floor, which opens to a terraced backyard for sculpture display; spiral stair to backyard; massive brick chimney on east end wall; entrance at north elevation is sheltered by carport. Several prominent brightly colored sculptures dot the landscape.

41 Usonia Road (Site 46) Gabel House, 1951; Architect: Aaron Resnick multi-story L-shaped residence; constructed of concrete slab and horizontal cypress siding; shed-roofed two-story wing to the east was added to the original sprawling one-story wing to the west with low pitched gable roof with overhanging eaves; windows in the addition are double-hung sash

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42 Usonia Road (Site 47) Scheiner House, 1955; architect: Warner and Leeds

two-story residence with a sharply pitched asymmetrical roof, which terminates a few feet from the ground and creates a "copper wall" on the west facing elevation. The structure is constructed of concrete slab, fieldstone, and horizontal cypress siding and is set into a sloping hillside, creating a carport under the second story on the west elevation. The carport shelters the main entrance, which is concealed by the sloping copper roof. A terrace extends off of the south elevation on the second floor over the carport and past the copper roof, forming a small cantilever. South elevation is almost entirely composed of large glass windows, and on the first story a stone patio extends south from the home, accessible by steps up from the driveway; one-story wing to the north

43 Usonia Road (Site 50) Lerner House, 1964, Architect: Lawrence Lerner

one-story, rectangular house on sloping site; constructed of concrete slab and dark stained horizontal siding; driveway, carport and entry on grade; large balcony/terrace extends west, forming a perpendicular wing resting on steel supports; living room, which extends south, is surrounded by tall glass windows; floor is dropped several feet making that room taller than rest of house; flat roof with canted brise soleil over living room; large pergola over balcony. Built in 1964, this is the last of the original homes

44 Usonia Road (Site 48): Reisley House, 1952; architect: Frank Lloyd Wright; addition, 1957; Architect Frank Lloyd Wright

one-story rectangular residence constructed on a triangular module; pitched roof with overhanging eaves; constructed of concrete slab, stone and cypress with horizontal V-joint siding; built into steeply sloping hillside so that west elevation has exposed basement; original section set between massive stone chimney and over scaled stone end wall; cantilevered deck along northwest elevation; northeast elevation marked by a sweeping triangular carport resting on a massive stone pier; carport shelters main entrance; rectangular one-story bedroom wing addition extends from southeast elevation

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46 Usonia Road (Site 49) Watts House, 1949; Architect: Schweikher & Elting

one-story, long rectilinear residence built into the hillside so that it has an exposed basement garage on west elevation; built of concrete slab, brick and horizontal cypress siding; flat roof with deeply overhanging eaves intersects with low pitched shed roof that shelters south elevation; large porch wraps around south and west elevations, originally cantilevered, now supported by iron poles; stairs on the north elevation provide access from the driveway to the main level; massive brick chimney is a prominent feature on the west elevation.

Usonia Road Pump House: one-story square stone structure; shed roof missing

2 Wright Way (Site 35) Benjamin Henken House, 1949; Architect: David Henken; addition 1994; Architect: Michael Wu

one-story residence; flat roof and clerestory window; constructed of concrete slab, red brick, and cypress siding. The original portion of the home is built into a sloping hillside on the northwestern elevation, while the southeastern elevation is exposed and lets light into the living spaces. Originally 900 square feet, the building has tripled in size; however, additions maintain the original design intent. **NON-CONTRIBUTING**
A contemporary carport **non-contributing** exists on the northeastern end of the property.

4 Wright Way (Site 34) David Henken House, 1949; Architect: David Henken

one-story polygonal residence; pitched roof; constructed of concrete slab, red brick, concrete block and horizontal cypress siding. The house features extensive floor to ceiling fenestration on the southern elevation; western façade is built into a sloping hillside with clerestory windows; building features roof pergolas; c1980 an additional wing with bedroom/living space and lap pool was added by Henken. Detached triangular studio set at a higher elevation on the northern end of the property.

Usonia Historic District

Name of Property

Westchester County, New York

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.)

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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Community Planning
- Architecture
- Landscape Architecture
- _____
- _____
- _____

Period of Significance

1949-1964

Significant Dates

na

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

na

Cultural Affiliation

na

Architect/Builder

Frank Lloyd Wright, David Henken, Aaron Resnick, et al

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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Summary

The Usonia Historic District is significant in community planning, architecture, landscape architecture, and social history as one of only three communities in the United States planned by master architect Frank Lloyd Wright, for its outstanding collection of modern residential architecture, and for its association with cooperative housing in the mid-twentieth century. Developed on a ninety-seven-acre parcel in northern Westchester County, Usonia embodies the principles that Wright set forth in the Broadacre City model, which gave form to the architect's radical re-conception of the American city. Developed in 1934, Broadacre City was a hypothetical section of much larger plan for America that the architect called Usonia. Broadacres re-imagined the city as a decentralized, theoretically endless horizontal expanse. It incorporated the form and symbolism of the prairie, especially its references to infinite freedom, diversity and choice, and repositioned the citizen at the center, where each was allocated a one-acre lot on which to construct a single-family home. Wright believed that reversing the usual urban hierarchy of civic and residential buildings would affirm the individual's position at the center of society, thus placing the citizen in control of personal destiny and correcting what Wright saw as the flaw in the contemporary urban experience. Wright populated Broadacre City with examples of his innovative, modern, Usonian house, the architect's proposed solution to the American single-family affordable house problem. Rather than a wholesale makeover of the American landscape, Wright envisioned that individual groups and architects would gradually effect the transition to Usonia over time. In the late 1940s, Wright had the opportunity to design plans for three communities, all cooperatives, that he used to experiment with the ideas embodied in the Broadacre City model. For all three, Wright planned both a unified community and a collection of individually diverse, private building sites. All three were designed to harmonize with the natural landscape and featured circular, one-acre-house sites, narrow serpentine roads, and commonly owned land between building parcels. Each was to include homes designed following Usonian principles. Wright designed several residences in each community, and others were designed by architects following his principles.

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Of these communities, Usonia is the largest, the most completely developed, and the most intact.¹ Situated north of the Kensico Reservoir and east of the village of Pleasantville, Usonia was laid out amid rolling, wooded terrain. Wright's original 1947 plan called for fifty-five single-family house lots for the intended fifty members to choose from. Only minimal clearing was proposed for each building site; natural vegetation was to be preserved throughout, and sixteen-foot unpaved roads wove through the parcel following the topography to connect the individual lots. All land outside the building lots was to be preserved as common space and no fences would separate building sites. Some land was also set aside for amenities such as a community house and a pool. The original plan was slightly modified in 1948 by architects Aaron Resnick and David Henken, both members of the community, with Wright's approval. Changes includes a slight increase in the size of individual lots, elimination of several undesirable lots, and minor repositioning of roads and lots to take better advantage of the topography. Nevertheless, the revised plan retained all the character-defining features of Wright's original plan, including the lot sizes, circular shapes, relationship to each other, plantings, circulation system, and siting of buildings. Subsequently, the circular lots were redrawn as polygonal shapes at the insistence of local zoning officials. However, because "official" lot lines were never demarcated by plantings or fences, because the community retained natural vegetation between the lots as Wright recommended, and because the houses were sited within the identified circular sites according to the plan, Usonia retains the visual character that Wright intended.

Usonia is also significant in architecture for its outstanding collection of post-World War II modern residential architecture constructed between 1949 and 1963. Three houses in the community were designed by Wright himself, and each is a masterful example of the Usonian house type, the architect's major contribution to middle-class residential architecture in the period between c1936 and his death in 1959. Of the other buildings in the district, thirty-seven were designed by Wright's apprentices and/or by disciples using the Usonian

¹ The other two, both located near Kalamazoo, Michigan, are Galesburg Country Homes (NR listed) and Parkwyn Village.

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principles that Wright laid out; two others were remodeled by Wright apprentices; and the others are representative examples of mid-twentieth century modern residential architecture that are compatible with the Usonian examples. The majority of the residences are one-story buildings constructed of concrete, cypress siding, and natural stone or brick. Some were built into the sloping hillsides, while others were carefully fit into the natural topography so as to appear to grow from their sites. Most were constructed on concrete slabs and featured radiant, in-floor heat, large, central masonry fireplaces, banks of windows, maximum connections between inside and out, and built-in furnishings. Interiors featured open plans, central family spaces, and separated bedroom wings. Even those houses that were enlarged, rebuilt, or constructed after the period of significance were designed using compatible scale, materials, and forms, and, while the latter do not contribute to the significance of the district, they help to maintain an outstanding degree of overall consistency in its character.

Usonia is also significant in social history for its association with the suburban growth of Westchester County after World War II and as an example of a post-World War II cooperative community. Usonia was founded by David Henken, a New York City socialist and engineer. Inspired by a 1940 retrospective of Wright's work that included the Broadacre City model, Henken believed that Wright's decentralized city, with its focus on individual freedom and organic harmony, could provide an appropriate physical model for the cooperative community that he had long hoped to establish. Henken apprenticed with Wright at Taliesin for two years before returning to New York to work out the details of forming a cooperative and recruiting members. Usonia Homes: A Cooperative, Inc. was founded in 1945 as a Rochdale Cooperative, modeling itself after the association that is generally credited with setting the rules for modern American cooperatives. Like that of the Rochdale pioneers, Usonia's cooperative housing corporation was based on voluntary and open membership, a limited return on capital, profit sharing, and strictly democratic decision making. The Usonians applied these principles to their goal of building a neighborhood of cooperatively owned, affordable homes near New York

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City. Dedication to these mutually held values and goals sustained the members, primary young urban professionals with new families, through their joint purchase of the site, the process of pooling their funds to build the first group of homes, the long struggle to find a bank that would issue a mortgage to homes of Modern design that were cooperatively held, and the prolonged course of design selection, review and construction. A number of them were World War II veterans, who, like thousands of others, had returned from the war ready to start families only to face one of the worst housing crises in the history of the country. It was this, along with other factors of modern life, that sparked the suburban development of Westchester and Long Island in the post-war period.

Despite the overall success of establishing and building the cooperative, the complications of its financial structure, the lack of enthusiastic support from government and financial institutions, and the multiple stresses generated by attempting to build more than forty innovative modern homes with inexperienced builders and limited funds eventually compelled Usonia in 1955 to make the transition to a community that was composed of privately held residences combined with commonly held land, roads, and utilities. As Usonia developed and grew long after Wright's association with the community ended, members remained fiercely loyal to his original design ideas and to the ideology of its founders. Today the community continues to make decisions through a long and successful tradition of consensus. The Usonia Historic District is a rare and significant illustration of Frank Lloyd Wright's ideas about modern American living that is associated with an important aspect of social history in post-war America. Despite changes as the community evolved to meet the needs of members over more than half a century, its character has been maintained to an outstanding degree.

Westchester County and Post World War II Suburban Development

Westchester County was established in 1683 by the New York General Assembly as one of New York's original twelve counties. Westchester is approximately 457 square miles and is located on the east side of the Hudson

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River, bordered by Connecticut and the Long Island Sound to the west, Putnam County on the north, and the Bronx on the south. Since its founding, Westchester has been inextricably linked to New York City by agricultural foodstuffs, clean water, country estates, and recreation—aspects that “have historically linked city and suburb.”² This closeness to New York City has remained important to its formation, with two major water frontages heading north and east from the city, as well as land trade routes, connecting New York to Albany and Boston. Transportation networks developed along these routes, which generally followed the country’s major river valleys, with the advent of the railroad in the nineteenth century and automobile parkways and highways in the twentieth century.³

Northern Westchester contained fertile farmlands, especially in Yorktown, Somers and Bedford, and this facilitated agricultural settlement prior to 1850.⁴ While originally a heavily farmed area, with produce shipped to New York City supporting a lucrative trade, that slowly began to dissolve with the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. According to historian Roger Panetta, “the slow but persistent decline of Westchester’s farms throughout the nineteenth century was a by-product not only of the transportation revolution, but also of the degradation of the land.”⁵ The decline of farming left large tracts of cleared land for prospective subdivision and was first noticed by wealthy urbanites looking for country estates outside the city.

The evolution of transportation played a large role in the development of Westchester. The introduction of the commuter railroad was a key aspect of the county’s initial suburbanization. Train routes became selling points for residential development, and entire communities began to emerge as early as the mid-1800s. One such community was Dearman, along the Hudson Line, which was advertised by a local newspaper in 1850 as

² Roger Panetta, “Westchester the American Suburb: A New Narrative,” in *Westchester the American Suburb* (n.p.: Fordham University Press, 2006), 7.

³ Frank Sanchis, *American Architecture, Westchester County, New York: Colonial to Contemporary* (n.p.: Harbor Hill Books, 1977), 1.

⁴ Sanchis, 2.

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heralding the convenience of Westchester for the business man: "The proximity of the County of Westchester to New York, and the decided advantages which it possess as a place of residence for the business community of the city, over other neighboring counties, renders it particularly beneficial in all points of view, as a resort at all seasons of the year, for all classes and descriptions of businessmen."⁶

By mid-century, Westchester "was traversed with railroad tracks which became the pathways for suburban development."⁷ This early landscape was shaped by the likes of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, with their 1871 plan for Tarrytown Heights. They laid out a whole district, which was "3 miles in length, stretched over 653 acres, and offering 153 building sites....The district would be intersected by New York, Boston and Northern Railroad, providing regular commuter service to New York City."⁸ Other similar communities were designed, including Rochelle Park in 1871, River View Manor in Hastings (1870), Rochelle Heights in New Rochelle (1905), Lawrence Park in Bronxville (1890), Park Hill in Yonkers (1889), and Philipse Manor in Sleepy Hollow (1890). Panetta observes that by the turn of the twentieth century "Westchester had witnessed the dawn of the modern subdivision."⁹ Historian Mary Corbin Sies points to a shared set of ideals across suburban communities, including, "personal independence, freedom of choice, family pride, self-sufficiency and private enterprise. Linking to these ideals helped the suburbs establish their centrality to the American experience."¹⁰ These communities were bolstered by the electrification of the suburban commuter rail lines in 1903, along with the completion of Grand Central Station, the destination of Westchester's commuter lines, in 1913.

⁵ Sanchis, 8.

⁶ *Hudson River Chronicle*, April 30, 1850, as quoted by Roger Panetta, 18.

⁷ Panetta, 19.

⁸ Panetta, 30.

⁹ Panetta, 31.

¹⁰ Panetta, 32.

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The automobile had a direct effect on suburban development in Westchester County, beginning with the construction of the Bronx River Parkway, the first limited-access automobile parkway in the United States, in the early 1920s. The Bronx Parkway originated as a conservation measure with a secondary purpose as a recreational outlet for wealthy New Yorkers. It became additionally significant as a catalyst to suburban development, demonstrating the potential for increased property values associated with parkway development, as new subdivisions sprang up on either side of the new parkway, and it was used in retail advertisements for new housing. Close on the success of the Bronx River Parkway, the Westchester County Parks Department conceived a system of parks dispersed throughout the county and connected by boulevards or parkways. Suburban development following parkways changed the pace of settlement in the county so much that it was impossible not to acknowledge the parks and parkways as important components of regional planning efforts. The county eventually developed more than 17,000 acres of parkland and 160 miles of parkways. However, during the following decade's depression, Westchester Country was hit with unemployment, foreclosures and hardships like the rest of the nation. It was not until the post-World War II democratization of housing that the area boomed as a suburban center again.

One of the most dramatic periods of suburban development in Westchester (and the United States more broadly) was the post-World War II housing boom. This boom was influenced by increased automobile ownership, advanced building technology, and a severe shortage of housing, in part precipitated by millions of returning veterans eager to marry and start families. Even had they wanted to live in cities, there was simply not enough available urban housing to accommodate them. Moreover, the suburbs beckoned, promising a new and improved version of the American dream, where everyone could own their own home and private backyard. The sudden proliferation of government-funded highways made that dream easier to reach. Government funding brought the dream of home ownership to more and more Americans, as programs like the Federal

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Housing Administration worked to "stimulate the moderate-cost private-housing market."¹¹ From 1944 to 1946, single-family housing increased eight-fold, from 114,000 to 937,000.¹² By 1950, home building had reached an unprecedented scale, with 1,692,00 single family homes built.¹³ It was during this time that pre-fabricated large-scale production became possible. In 1947 developer William Levitt applied these principles to home building in an 18,000 house subdivision, Levittown, on Long Island. Levitt lowered the production cost of homes, through streamlined assembly line technology and pre-cut panel systems. While development in Westchester at this time did not resemble the scope of Levittown, its "smaller developments replicated its patterns of standardized design, reduced construction costs, and affordable purchase prices."¹⁴

Frank Lloyd Wright

Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959) is regarded as one of America's greatest architects. Born just after the Civil War, Wright's long life nearly coincided with the second century of the country's history and spanned the period in which the United States moved from a pre-industrial agrarian society with an open frontier to a fully industrialized one in which large segments of the population were crowded into urban areas. Wright was raised as a Unitarian, a religion founded on the basis of pluralism, and he inherited an idealized vision of American democracy and a heroic image of its founders. Influenced by the Jeffersonian idea of a decentralized society and raised in the Midwest, Wright's concept of the free and autonomous individual was intimately linked to the values he believed to be inherent in an agrarian land-holding society. Like others in this period of rapid social change, Wright was concerned with the threat to individualism posed by centralization and cultural unity.

¹¹ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981), 97.

¹² David Ames and Linda Flint McClelland, *Historic Residential Suburbs: Guidelines for Evaluation of Documentation for the National Register of Historic Places* (Washington: US Department of the Interior, 2002), 65.

¹³ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 233.

¹⁴ Panetta, 59.

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Wright's artistic philosophy was grounded in Romantic ideas about individualism and emotional authenticity. Romanticism had developed in response to the social upheavals that marked the end of the eighteenth century. Events such as the failure of the French Revolution posed a threat to the rational principles of the Enlightenment. In questioning reason as the source of a single external truth, Romantics looked inward to their own subjective feelings and perceptions, and the resulting acknowledgment of multiple truths both legitimized the self as the ultimate authority and led to a new artistic freedom.

Embracing Romanticism allowed Wright to filter the threads of individualism through the idea of an enlightened democratic society in which the individual was free to reinvent him or herself. He equated the intellectual and spatial freedom of the American continent with the possibility and choice inherent in American society. As long as there was wilderness left to conquer, the individual was free to move on and stake out a new life. As an artist who undertook providing shelter for the citizen as his mission, Wright believed that he could embody democracy in architecture by giving form to his concept of the sovereign self. Over a long career he worked to integrate man, nature, and society in an architectural form that offered a fully developed model of the place of an individual in a democracy, while attempting to resolve the inherent conflict between the individual and society. Wright looked to nature to provide a system of order, a framework for personal expression. He developed the idea of an organic architecture based on the perception and expression of natural rhythm, pattern, structure, and growth toward a "clear direct expression of the ... nature of the thing itself."¹⁵ As a Romantic artist, he assumed the authority to learn the secrets of diversity and unity for himself so that he could use them to give form to essential ideas about structure and shelter, the diverse needs of each individual, and a society premised on the autonomous individual.

¹⁵ Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography* (New York: Horizon Press, 1932), 336.

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Deeply inspired by his farm upbringing, Wright drew his major inspiration from the American landscape. He was captivated by the broad horizontal line of the American prairie, which he equated with endless freedom, diversity, and choice. As such, the prairie became one of the most important reference points in his entire body of work, an endless horizontal line that found expression in the design of ornament, the siting, form, and massing of buildings, and the planning of cities. Despite his preference for the horizontal, Wright also explored the vertical form, most dramatically in the proposal for a Mile High Skyscraper (1956) but also in a number of other projects, including the 1929 proposal for three residential towers surrounding St. Mark's in the Bowery in Manhattan. Although the latter project was unrealized, the design reappeared in 1956, when it was used for the Price Tower in Bartlesville, OK, where the nineteen-story building dominated the skyline of the small city and was visible for miles across the broad, flat country that surrounded it. Wright referred to the Price Tower as "the tower that escaped the crowded forest," as if to suggest that although the building was intended for an urban setting, its "flight" had gained it a certain freedom and autonomy.

Although Wright was anti-urban in the sense that he believed that the modern city denied the citizen the opportunity for growth, an essential freedom, he was also captivated by cities and designed numerous works – theoretical, unbuilt and built – for urban environments. He was also keenly interested in creating models for individuals to live autonomously and cooperatively in groups. Wright's most significant comment on urbanism was his conceptual plan for a reformed American society built around the American citizen that he called Usonia. Comprising one endless decentralized city, Usonia both acknowledged the reality of the city and presented a challenge to its authority. By reducing the city to an individual scale and premising its existence on the needs of the individual for services, Wright reasoned that the city would no longer be able to exert authority over the citizen.

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In 1934 Wright's Taliesin apprentices constructed a model showing what a section of such a decentralized city might look like. Known as the Broadacre City Model, the construction represented four square miles of land (or 2,560 acres), which was intended to accommodate about 1,400 families.¹⁶ Like Usonia, Broadacre City was premised on a theoretically endless horizontal expanse and incorporated the form and symbolism of the prairie, especially its references to infinite freedom, diversity and choice. Each of Broadacre City's citizens (or families) was to be allotted a one-acre lot on which to construct a single-family house. Although the plan included all sorts of civic, commercial, and utilitarian features, these were dispersed throughout the landscape rather than concentrated in "centers," as in a traditional city. Instead, Wright reversed the usual hierarchy by allocating the largest number of lots to single-family homes and by platting these lots in the choicest, center section of the plan. Wright believed that with their status as the central element in society thus affirmed, the citizens of Broadacre City would regain control of their lives, thus correcting the central flaw in the contemporary urban experience. Wright envisioned a utopia of human scale with home in the center.

The Usonian House

The Broadacre City plan revealed for the first time the new conception of individual shelter and organic design that the architect began calling the Usonian house. The Usonian house continued and expanded many of the ideas for the natural house that Wright had used in his earlier domestic designs, but the Usonian house differs from its Prairie house ancestor in several important ways: The Usonian house was a modern house; its design and execution were only possible with modern materials and technology, within a modern aesthetic, and for a modern society. The Usonian house was a simple house; it depended on clarity of construction and simplicity of detail. And the Usonian house was intended to be a low-cost house; it was premised on standard materials, prefabricated parts and do-it-yourself labor. Although Wright never succeeded in keeping the cost affordable, it was always his intent to do so.

¹⁶ Wright, *An Autobiography*, 14.

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The Usonian house also surpassed Wright's earlier ideas of organic architecture: the Usonian house grew intrinsically and organically from its site, extending the horizontal line dramatically. The Usonian house embodied continuity - of pattern, materials and design - and plasticity, an expansive flow of continuous surface inside and out. The entire design, structure and ornament of the Usonian house both expressed the inner rhythm of its own form and was linked to the irrational natural world outside its bounds by the complex interpenetration of outside and inside living spaces. Most important, the Usonian house was intended for everyone. Affordable (in intent), insular and organic, the Usonian house was conceived as a protective enclosure around the individual and the family, Built to human proportions in seemingly endless variety (hundreds were designed) and incorporating personalized connections between pattern, materials, function and setting, the Usonian house embodies the substance of Wright's ideas on architecture, the individual and democracy.

The Usonian house was developed over a five to ten year period in the late 1920s and early 1930s and was specifically intended to address what Wright considered to be America's major problem: the house of moderate cost. By fostering a new way of living and a new integration of nature, home and family, Usonians were seen as advance agents for the reformed, decentralized, self-centered society that was to come. Prototypical elements of the Usonian house appeared in several Wright commissions of the early 1930s, but it wasn't until 1936 that a commission for a small, \$5,000 house for the Herbert Jacobs family in Madison, Wisconsin, provided Wright with the chance to apply his Usonian ideas to the needs of a modern family. With its small size, simple plan, and relatively low cost, the Jacobs house was among the most modest of Usonians. Yet in designing a house that would provide the Jacobs family with shelter and space, Wright made good on all of his promises.

Although unassuming, the Jacobs house commands its lot and claims it as this family's bit of Usonia. The L-shaped building turns its back on the neighborhood and fortifies the sheltered space within. In concept and execution the Jacobs house epitomizes simplicity. The harmony of idea and object is evinced by the extreme

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abstraction of the house form, which Wright distilled to the essence of structure and shelter, eliminating basement, attic, visible roof and garage on the exterior and plaster, paint, trim, radiators and extraneous furniture on the interior. Some of these changes were made possible by Wright's innovative construction techniques, such as his three-part horizontal board and batten walls, which allowed for a continuous natural surface inside and out with insulation between that required no maintenance. Likewise, the concrete slab was laid over a system of pipes through which hot water was circulated to warm the house by radiant heat.

Like all Usonians, the entire design of the Jacobs house flowed from a geometric module (a 2' by 4' rectangle) that served as its primary organizing element, governing every aspect of the plan, including the proportions and dimensions of forms and materials, the locations of structural elements, room dimensions, forms and materials, and the size, shape and placement of openings. This planning grid was printed in the architect's drawings and embedded in the concrete floor to serve as a practical guide to construction, but its proportioning system was discernible in a multitude of details large and small that ensured both continuity and variety.

Functionally, the house's deceptively simple L-form both pulled it together around the central workspace (sited at the intersection of the two wings) and thrust it apart, allowing for the separation of public (living) and private (sleeping) activities in opposite ends of the house. The workspace (which included kitchen and dining areas) was positioned literally and symbolically at the center, ensconced within a central masonry core that also accommodated a bathroom, and a massive fireplace oriented toward the living space. The living area was characterized by an open plan allowing for shared family activities, while the longer wing was divided into small private sleeping chambers. All furniture was built in, made to order or handmade to serve the house's simple program and the family's modest lifestyle.

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The ideas that governed the design of the Jacobs house governed the designs of all Usonian, from the most simple to the most complex, despite their great variety of location, setting, materials, size, and form. While all Wright's Usonian homes were individually designed for the client and the site, each one was designed using a geometric planning grid, and they all share characteristics such as an open living plan, predominantly single-story construction, flat or low pitched roofs, carports instead of garages, and a "polliwog" plan. This form, as described by Wright, considers the living/dining/work spaces to be the core or "tadpole's body," while the bedroom wing is narrow (representative of a tadpole tail). This polliwog form could be interpreted and expanded upon in multiple different ways, including an "L" or "T" plan, a rectangular grid intercepted by a wing, "in-line" plan, hexagonal plan, circular plan, and a rectangular grid on masonry piers.¹⁷

Significant compositional elements of the Usonian home include a flat, reinforced concrete slab and a radiant heating system. Roofs are usually low and flat with wide fascias and projecting eaves. Windows are typically grouped in continuous horizontal bands with mullions that structurally support the roof and are generally single pane, fixed, casement or awning type. Windows often feature plate glass and mitered elements. An adherence to the horizontal and vertical unit modules determines every element of the Usonian interior.

The Usonian house was an extreme abstraction of the ideas about shelter that Wright had been working with since the 1890s. In expressing a harmony of idea and object, Wright eliminated everything extraneous. The Usonian grew intrinsically from its site, extended the horizontal line dramatically, embodied continuity of pattern, material and design, and was characterized by an expansive flow of continuous space inside and out. In the last period of his life, Wright was preoccupied with the Usonian house, designing approximately ninety built Usonians as well as several planned cooperative communities that were intended to embody, on a small scale, his visionary architectural and social ideas.

¹⁷ John Seargent, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses* (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1984), 40.

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Cooperative Communities

“Association will have its Architecture, - and it will be the architecture of connection, unity, and harmony.”¹⁸
The idea of cooperation has deep roots in American history and is closely tied to the utopian ideal that influenced the development of American democracy: the impulse to form a more perfect society of balanced parts in voluntary association in a place free from the limits of space, traditional authority, and static class structure. This idea fueled both social and architectural experiments in the new world and some that combined both. If those who settled the new country perceived a nearly untouched wilderness, Americans since that time have continued to cherish at least a symbolic one; as long as there was wilderness to conquer, Americas could continue to search for the key to the underlying natural order and to found societies based on those clarifying abstractions. Yet, nearly all tangible manifestations of idealism – such as the numerous utopian communities founded in nineteenth-century America – embodied a single version of the ideal that failed to recognize the diversity of members, failed to provide a mechanism for change, and/or failed to include a method for compromise, and most fell victim to the inevitable stresses of these forces.

The formation of cooperative societies is a more practical application of idealism, in that members must devise an operational framework that is capable of meeting their’ needs and expectations within the larger construct of the political and society entity which it is formed. Modern liberal democratic cooperatives emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, particularly in the period following the industrial revolution, which precipitated the loss of small, home-based businesses and family farms and the rise of large-scale urban industries, with their dehumanizing effects on workers. Workers banded together into cooperatives to secure a measure of influence and independence in their own economic lives.

¹⁸ Albert Brisbane, *Social Destiny of Man, or, Association and Reorganization of Industry*, Vol. 3 (Philadelphia: C. F. Stollmeyer, 1840), 363.

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The "Rochdale pioneers," a group of English weavers who founded a consumer cooperative 1844, have been credited with setting the rules for modern cooperatives. Although the Rochdale weavers were only partially successful in realizing their goals of a multi-faceted cooperative society, the Rochdale rules marked a major step in defining the scope of voluntary, partial, participatory cooperation – perhaps the only form of collectivism that could succeed in the United States without contradicting commonly held beliefs about American individualism. The so-called "Rochdale rules," which strongly influenced the development of Usonia, are grounded in voluntary and open membership; democratic control; limited return on capital; profit sharing; joint ownership of land, member education; and cooperation among cooperatives. The goal was to work within the capitalist society to obtain the maximum individual benefit for each member, while exercising a check on the competition and exploitation that often results from unregulated capitalism. The most important elements of the Rochdale system are its emphasis on voluntary and varying amounts of participation, strict adherence to the one member/one vote rule, and the restraints on competition, speculation and exploitation provided by the removal of the profit motive.

Cooperatives emerged only sporadically in America during the nineteenth century, with most consisting of agricultural producers (such as creameries), those who joined together to provide themselves with insurance or fire protection, and consumer bulk purchasing groups. However, a number of experimental urban cooperative housing projects were developed after World War I, almost all in the New York City area. Most were founded under the auspices of the Cooperative League of the United States, organized in 1916 to promote a broad cooperative agenda.

The earliest of New York's housing coops were developed in the 1920s by Finnish immigrants in Brooklyn, but the most famous and influential were the United Workers Cooperative Apartments, which, when it was built in the Bronx in 1926-29, was the largest cooperative housing complex in America. The United Workers

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Cooperative was part of the larger movement promoted by the Cooperative League to bring cooperative ownership to all aspects of American life. Established by Eastern European Jews who worked in the garment industry, the United Workers Cooperative sought to provide quality low-cost housing for its members outside of a profit-making enterprise, while also allowing members to build and own their own homes. All real estate was owned by the cooperative, and the first buildings were financed through members' savings. Individual members bought a share and a perpetual lease for a single apartment and paid the association for maintenance. When the member left, the association re-purchased the share, but the member received no profit. The close ties of the members, who shared ethnic, religious, political and social affiliations, contributed to the development of an extremely close community that shared, in addition to housing, a particular lifestyle.¹⁹

While there were a number of similar urban cooperative housing experiments in the 1920s, the idea of cooperative housing did not catch on in rural and suburban areas, where the traditional single-family home remained the norm. However, the onset of the Great Depression brought a renewed interest in cooperative ventures. The idea may have appealed to the lower classes, who had literally nothing to lose in an experimental venture and to whom pooling their resources may have seemed the only way to maintain their independent economic status. Unfortunately, some cooperatives were actually at more risk during the Depression because their opposition to capitalism made them more vulnerable to its collapse, and their idealism didn't allow them to embrace the type of "business-like" practices, such as ousting those who couldn't pay, that might have saved them.²⁰ However, by 1934, there was enough general interest in cooperative living that the Bureau of Labor Statistics published Bulletin 608, "Organization and Management of Cooperative Housing Associations (with Model By-Laws)." Nevertheless, the effects of the Depression were so severe that home building of any sort soon came to a virtual halt.

¹⁹ Andrew Dolkart, *United Workers Cooperatives, Bronx County, New York*, National Register Nomination, 1986.

²⁰ Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 161.

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The creation of the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), under the National Housing Act of 1934, was intended to stimulate the stalled housing industry. Prior to the FHA, most home loans were traditionally given for very short periods – three to five years – and at high interest rates – 5 to 10 percent. This required a substantial amount of ready cash that put home ownership out of reach for much of the middle class. However, the new loan insurance offered by the FHA would insure up to 80 percent of a home loan for up to twenty years at 5 percent interest, thus making long-term mortgages, in which people paid a small amount each month, possible for the first time. While this revolutionized home buying, qualified millions of people for homeownership, and greatly stimulated new construction, the FHA became an obstacle to the viability of cooperative housing communities because the agency, which had to approve the buildings it insured, distrusted cooperatives and embraced a very conservative approach to design, preferring the staid and traditional over the new and innovative, thus giving it enormous influence over the stylistic development of residential architecture.

In the early 1940s interest in cooperatives began to rise again, fueled by a reaction to capitalistic society on the part of left-leaning and centrist groups that saw cooperation as a practical yet socially fair method of achieving economic benefits and a way for ordinary citizens to bypass political, racial, and ethnic differences to achieve common goals.²¹ The U.S. General Housing Act of 1945 (eventually passed as the National Housing Act of 1949) included a provision allowing for low-interest FHA mortgages for non-profit mutual ownership housing corporations.²² In addition, in 1946 the Bureau of Labor Statistics replaced its Bulletin 608, which provided information about cooperatives, with Bulletin 858, an updated version of the information. After World War II, the demand for housing overwhelmed the industry, as millions of returning veterans eager to start families could not be provided with new homes fast enough. Some began to see cooperation as a more efficient way for individuals to further their goals for affordable housing. For example, rent or membership fees paid in advance

²¹ Roland Reisley, *Usonia, New York: Building a Community with Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001), 12.

²² Reisley, 12.

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could create a fund for the purchase of a site that could avoid outside overhead and disperse the individual financial burden.²³

Frank Lloyd Wright, Cooperatives and Communities

Frank Lloyd Wright's ideas about the single family home, decentralized planning and cooperative societies came together in the late 1920s and early 1930s, a period in which his own status as an outsider, followed by the Depression, allowed him to take a critical look at the American ideas of profit and property, at the power of land as a commodity, and at the poverty and exploitation caused by what he called the "renter class," who derived their income from control of the land and property and their exploitation of those who depended on them for shelter. It was partially in response that Wright put forth his massive proposal for a reformed American society, a completely decentralized society premised on the single-family home. Wright's most fundamental belief was in the sovereignty of the individual. His embrace of the agrarian land-holding values of Jefferson, the romantic individualism of Thoreau and Whitman, and the pragmatic reformist views of Wisconsin's populist party at the turn of the twentieth century were all synthesized in Wright's idea of democracy, which juxtaposed the rights of the group with those of the individual in a carefully balanced equation. For Wright himself, the former always served the latter, and this combined with Wright's own failures in the capitalist system may help explain his sympathies for the cooperative movement as it was understood in America at this time. If Broadacre City was premised on regaining citizen control of the land and the means of production for maximum individual benefit, Wright saw that cooperation might be an effective means to that end.

Wright prepared designs for five cooperative communities between 1939 and 1950. Although not all were carried out or retained their cooperative status, these commissions gave the architect the chance to give form to the idea of cooperative living and to attempt to effect the transition to a Usonian society. All five reflect his

²³ Plunz, 161.

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continuing experimentation with the ideas laid out in the Broadacre City Plan. The earliest, known as Usonia I, was commissioned in 1939 by seven faculty members from Michigan State University at Lansing. The group, which already had a consumer cooperative, wanted to construct a housing project on a forty-acre site near the East Lansing campus and sought Wright's help in determining the most advantageous siting for each house within the rural surroundings, which they wished to preserve. Wright's plan called for seven one-acre house lots with gardens and a shared central farm with caretaker's residence. Although grouped around the farm, each residence was oriented away from the others and from the farm, providing it with an expansive private view. Despite their independent views, all the homes were to be connected by shared walkways, by their equivalent places in the plan, and by the plantings in the household gardens. After they had purchased the land, commissioned the plan and houses, participants ran short of private funds, and in 1939 they were forced to seek an FHA-insured mortgage. Although Wright himself traveled to Washington to present the application, FHA officials rejected the proposal. The denial was based on the agency's failure to recognize the value of modern design, which, officials believed, would hinder resale value. Other features that met with FHA skepticism included the lack of separation between the kitchen and living rooms, cantilevers, board and batten walls and unpainted and unprotected wood, both exterior and interior, and the radiant heat system. Ironically, a similar radiant heating system was used in all 18,000 Levittown houses with FHA approval just nine years later. Only one of Usonia I's Wright-designed residences, the Goetsch-Winckler House, was constructed, but it was built at another location.

A second project, Cooperative Homesteads (1942), near Detroit, was planned to provide affordable housing for autoworkers. Because it was intended to foster self-sufficiency, each one-acre house lot was also intended as an agricultural field. For this project, Wright designed a special "berm house," which featured an area below grade set aside as a workshop and/or for vegetable storage. Projected at \$4,000 per house, these homes might have proved affordable, but the project failed for unknown reasons. When drawings for this project were published

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in the January 1948 issue of *Architectural Record*, a special issue devoted to Wright's work, the architect suggested its fate in his heading: "Berm Houses for Cooperative Workers, Detroit, Michigan, Abandoned for Lack of Cooperation."²⁴

The plans for the other three cooperative communities, Galesburg County Homes, Parkwyn Village, and Usonia, were all designed during the same period in the late 1940s. These three plans are Wright's most complete and most fully developed community designs, realizing the complex interplay of social and architectural themes embodied in Broadacre City. The plans for all three communities, which were developed to varying degrees, were designed to fit into their natural settings and featured circular, one-acre lots linked by serpentine roads, community use areas, and common land between lots. Galesburg County Homes and Parkwyn Village are both located near Kalamazoo, Michigan. The two coops were originally one, mostly chemists from the Upjohn Institute who shared common goals, including the desire for large individual house sites, a well-planned and architecturally outstanding neighborhood with room for gardens and play areas, affordable housing obtained by buying and building in quantity, neighborhood stability to ensure property values, an equal share in decision-making, and the experience of working with others of similar views.²⁵ During the planning process, the group split over the choice of location, with one faction desiring a more rural location and the other preferring to be on the outskirts of the urban area. As a result, two cooperatives, Parkwyn Village Association and the Galesburg County Homes Association, formed, purchased individual sites, and commissioned plans from Wright.²⁶ Although the sites themselves were different, Wright used similar concepts in the designs, and all of his house designs (a total of eight houses for the two groups) were based on his concrete textile block designs. All of the blocks were made by the owners themselves on the Parkwyn site with instructions provided by Taliesin.

²⁴ In Brendan Gill, *Many Masks: A Life of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Putman, 1987), 424.

²⁵ From a brochure, in John Michael Desmond, "A Clearing in the Woods: Self & City in Frank Lloyd Wright's Organic Communities," PhD. Dissertation, MIT, 1996, 358.

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Galesburg Country Homes

The Galesburg group, the smaller of the two, with only five families, purchased seventy-one acres of high rolling land, including a stream and fifteen acres of woods, about ten miles outside the city. Although the group hoped to expand to fifteen families, it never exceeded half of that. Members of the Galesburg group asked Wright for a plan with fifteen one-acre lots, common garden land, and an orchard. They did not request circular lots; that was Wright's invention. However, they did suggest that the land between building lots be held in common. This was something that Wright had not done before but it became an seminal feature of all three of his community designs.²⁷ Wright's first plan was a complicated layout of forty-two potential house sites and an elaborate road system that looped around each lot. Although the members called the plan "the stuff dreams are made of," they asked Wright to revise it with fewer lots and a less complicated road system. In Wright's second scheme, the pattern was greatly simplified.²⁸ The number of lots had been reduced to twenty-one and they had been increased in size. Roadways were wider and there was a more straightforward circulation system. The plan specified an irregular placement of houses on lots and varied orientation of individual houses. Wright stipulated that the common land be preserved in its natural state and specified interspace plantings between the lots. The Galesburg members were able to finance their homes independently, without FHA help; thus, they did not face criticism over the "experimental" qualities of their homes or the unusual circular-shaped building lots. This is the only one of the three communities in which the circular lots have been literally preserved. Nevertheless, only a small portion of Wright's plan was developed. Six houses, four of them designed by Wright, were built; several other lots survive but have never been built on. The rest of the land remains undeveloped. Galesburg Country Homes was listed on the National Register in 2004.

²⁶ Desmond, 357.

²⁷ Desmond, 360.

²⁸ Desmond, 361.

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Parkwyn Village

The Parkwyn Village Association purchased a forty-seven-acre site on the outskirts of Kalamazoo. In contrast to the Galesburg land, the Parkwyn site was a treeless meadow on a high bluff overlooking a series of lakes. By summer of 1947, the group had seventeen members. The Parkwyn association initially requested half-acre lots for between forty and sixty families, recreation areas, playgrounds, picnic areas, gardens, and expressed interest in cooperative heating and sewage. The group, which planted more than a thousand new trees on the site, later revised the request to forty lots of up to one acre in size. Wright altered the Parkwyn plan twice in response to community concerns but praised the project as "an example of true democracy in action because it represents a group a people working together to achieve individual freedom."²⁹ Similar to the Galesburg plan, this one called for circular building lots with commonly owned land in between. However, like Usonia I, Parkwyn also had trouble with the FHA. The agency, concerned about who would be responsible for maintaining the interspace areas, worried that this uncertainly would affect resale prices. Eventually, FHA pressure persuaded the community to convert the circular lots to polygons. Since houses were already under construction on Wright's proposed building sites, the change in lot shape only affected the planned interspace plantings of native shrubs. However, even though members pledged to complete the interspace planting and thus uphold the visual character of the circular lots, this was never carried out. The flat topography made these plantings essential to convey subtly the delicate balance of public and private space. In addition, the conversion to polygons resulted in lots of greatly varying size, further subverting the idea of an egalitarian community, and subsequent owners planted trees and other vegetation to mark lot lines. Today, except for the architecture, which includes four houses designed by Wright, the layout of Parkwyn Village resembles a conventional suburb, with houses laid out along a street, and the effect Wright intended has been lost.

²⁹ "Famed Architect Frank Lloyd Wright Confers with Planners of 2 Model Villages," *Kalamazoo Gazette*, 3[?] November 1947, in Desmond, 420. [The emphasis is Wright's]

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Usonia Homes: A Cooperative, Inc.³⁰

Usonia was the brainchild of David Henken, a New York City engineer, who was first exposed to Wright's work at the Museum of Modern Art's retrospective on the architect in 1940. Henken and some friends, all young professionals and city residents, had been casually discussing the idea of forming a cooperative community before the retrospective. The MoMA exhibit included both the Broadacre City model and the plan of Usonia I, and Wright's ideas about the transformational aspect of organic architecture and the possibilities for a reformed society based on an organic community of single-family homes resonated with Henken's ideas for cooperative living. In 1941, Henken and his wife, Priscilla, moved to Taliesin for a two-year apprenticeship with Wright, and it was during that period that Henken enlisted Wright's help in designing a cooperative community based on the Broadacre principles. Priscilla Henken wrote that the motivation to build Usonia was, in part, the "democratic ideal of freedom of the individual."³¹ It was also a personal desire to obtain affordable housing with an element of idealism. Henken and his friends believed that a cooperative could help to achieve a more just society. They were committed to establishing social equity and they were willing to work for an alternative way of life.³²

By 1943 the Henkens had returned New York and began to work on forming the cooperative. They referred to their scheme as "the Usonian dream" because "the ideas behind cooperatives and Broadacre city were in tune with our social philosophy."³³ They talked to friends, family members, and strangers before deciding on a goal of fifty families – a number they felt would produce a community that was both cohesive and diverse and large enough to be economically viable. By 1944 thirteen families had agreed to join. The founding members

³⁰ This history of Usonia is derived almost exclusively from Roland Reisley's very comprehensive and thoughtful account, *Usonia, New York: Building a Community with Frank Lloyd Wright*, as well as interviews with Reisley conducted between 1989 and 2012 and interviews with Judy Podell and other community members by Kathleen LaFrank, NYSHPO, 1989. Specific information is footnoted.

³¹ Priscilla Henken, quoted in Desmond, p. 477.

³² Reisley, 4.

³³ Reisley, 9.

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contributed \$100 each, and in 1945 Usonia Homes: A Cooperative, Inc. was incorporated as a Rochdale Cooperative.

The pioneering members of Usonia were David Henken and his wife, Priscilla, a teacher; David's sister, Judith, a Social Service secretary, and her husband, Odif Podell, an industrial engineer; Priscilla's sister, Julia, and her husband, George Brody, a CPA; Aaron Resnick, a structural engineer, and his wife, Mildred, an art teacher; Murray Gabel, a teacher and insurance broker, and his wife, Gertrude, an art teacher; and Jack Masson, an insurance salesperson and co-op/union activist, and his wife, Ruth. Other active members who joined in 1947 included, Sidney Benzer, a dentist, and his wife, Florence, a jewelry artist; Ralph Miller, a chemical engineer, and his wife, Clara; Herbert Brandon, a trade paper publisher, and his wife, Ada; John Kepker, a craftsman, and his wife, Jean; and Rowland Watts, a civil rights lawyer activist, and his wife, Fay, a union leader. This group was the core of the community.³⁴

The Usonia cooperative was founded on the principle that all the members would be willing to take a risk to achieve a mutual benefit, and that out of that risk, a mutual purpose would emerge: that people would have a stake in each other's lives that would transcend momentary interest.³⁵ The mutual goal was to build a community of individually designed, cooperatively owned, affordable homes on one-acre sites in a suburb of New York City under the guidance of Frank Lloyd Wright. As with the Workers Cooperative Apartments, the individual homes would be built and owned by the coop, while members would receive ninety-ninety-year renewable leases on their homes and building sites. Upon joining, each member paid a fee of \$100 and purchased one \$5 share in the coop. Each then paid \$50 a month to the cooperative until they had saved 40 percent of the expected cost of the building, site, architect and other fees for their own building. The rest was expected to be mortgaged. Unfortunately, the cost of \$5,000 per house projected in 1945 proved a serious

³⁴ Reisley, 46.

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underestimate; by 1950, post-World War II cost increases had quadrupled that figure, and despite owners' participation in site clearing and building, bulk purchase of materials, sharing of funds, and other cost-saving measures, some of the original members dropped out for lack of funds.

From the beginning, the cooperative's founders took pains to ensure the success of the community by extensively screening members to determine their tolerance for people of different races and ethnicity, education and familial backgrounds, skills and interests, and to garner their ideas about community. The intent was not to assemble either a heterogeneous or a homogeneous group but one that would be able to cooperate, to work out the small details of getting along within a consistent framework of idealism.³⁶ The community that formed was guided by a general set of commonly held tenets that were more or less important to various members according to their own interests. Members placed the highest values on privacy and individuality, and, as a result, desires for privacy, flexibility and choice were directly reflected in the operational structure of the group. These same qualities were also reflected in the siting and design of individual homes, most of which are both public and secluded. All are relatively close together and nearly all can be seen from the community road and from each other; yet, each is sited to create an exclusive private enclave for its inhabitants.

During the organizational period, the founders also prepared an orientation to organic architecture for the young, urban, apartment-dwelling pioneers, most of whom had never lived in a house. An education committee provided books, lectures, field trips to another FLW designed Usonian home on Long Island, museum outings to see a model Usonian, and other activities. Wright himself visited, as did Edgar Kaufman Jr., a Taliesin apprentice whose parents had commissioned Fallingwater. Most members were pleased with the proposed designs, especially the open floor plans, broad windows, natural materials, and built in furnishings.³⁷

³⁵ Reisley, 10.

³⁶ Judy Podell, interview by Kathleen LaFrank, 1989.

³⁷ Reisley, 17.

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Between 1945 and 1946, Usonia secured an option to buy four contiguous parcels of land, totaling ninety-seven acres, in the town of Mount Pleasant, in northern Westchester County. Although they were unable to purchase the land until a tax auction at the end of 1946, many members adopted the site right away and began to visit for picnics and other outings. The land was acquired for \$23,000, purchased outright from the cooperative's funds. The long rectangular parcel was located just north of the Kensico Reservoir and bordered by a protective pine watershed on three sides. David Henken described it as having the "rolling quality of Taliesin...rocky knolls, clumps of trees, springs, and a brook or two. The hills and valleys would provide dramatic settings and a sense of privacy."³⁸ Others mentioned stone walls that were remnants of old farms, old and new growth, and a steep ridge. When Wright saw the property in March 1947, he described it as "beautiful and ideal for our project."³⁹

While awaiting final purchase of the land, the group focused on community organization. The members agreed on the so-called "primary purposes": the commitment to Wright's organic architecture and Usonian philosophy; the acceptance of a true cooperative community; and the devotion to creating affordable housing through innovative design and cooperative construction. Throughout this period, the early members, mostly young couples and new homeowners, remained committed to their ideals and to each other, while facing the uncertainties inherent in their choice of radically different architecture, cooperative community structure, and living at a distance from city, as well as bearing the stress of unknown costs and the skepticism of their more experienced parents and financial advisers.⁴⁰

In January 1947, the cooperative signed a contract with Wright stipulating that the architect would design the plan and not more than five houses; he would also review and approve the designs of the other architects. Wright's first plan for Usonia, submitted in April 1947, featured fifty-five circular, one-acre lots in clusters of

³⁸ David Henken, quoted in Reisley, 18.

³⁹ Frank Lloyd Wright, quoted in Reisley, 24.

⁴⁰ Reisley, 20; 60.

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six. Each cluster surrounded open land and all the land outside and between the circles was to be shared community land. Narrow, unpaved, serpentine roads wound through the community, connecting the circles. The plan preserved the overall character of the rolling, wooded land to an exceptional degree. No massive earth moving was called for, no extensive clearing and replanting, and the actual house sites were to be minimally cleared and graded. Although the cooperators received the plan with enthusiasm, Henken's more detailed study of the topography identified a few areas in need of improvement. Given his apprenticeship under Wright at Taliesin, Henken undertook the proposed revisions to the plan himself. In addition to eliminating several building sites that were undesirable due to exceptionally steep terrain or poor drainage, Henken also suggested enlarging the diameter of each circle slightly and siting the roads more closely to the topography. Henken conferred with Wright during this process, and the revised plan, drawn by Henken and Resnick, was subsequently approved by Wright in November 1947. Although these revisions made Wright's plan more buildable, they compromised none of its major features or the philosophical constructs upon which it was based. Rather, the revision can be better described as a practical matter of transferring the concept to a reality.

Although Usonia's plan was site specific, laid out over the natural topography, and accorded native plantings the primary role in landscaping, Wright also ensured that its character embodied the democratic and political structure of the cooperators. The plan is first of all egalitarian; each circle is exactly the same. It's also non-hierarchical, with no position among the circles seemingly better than any other position. It is both non-symmetrical and organized; the lots are set out according to the topographic character of the site but are also organized in groups of six. The plan also accommodates multiple perspectives: there is no single or "correct" way to describe the pattern prescribed by the designer and various different schemes are possible (for example, some lots are part of multiple groups of six). Although there appears to be an entrance gate at the south end of the parcel, there is no "formal" entrance in a design or hierarchical sense. And finally, despite the isolated and

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insular nature of the community, there are multiple access points to the surrounding area and varied routes through the community, allowing the members a measure of independence and anonymity.

As early as 1945, Usonia had appointed a building committee, consisting of Henken and Bernard Kessler (an engineer). After the land was purchased in 1947, the committee was expanded to include community member Aaron Resnick. Because Kessler left the committee soon after, Henken and Resnick had primary responsibility for overseeing building at Usonia. The two negotiated a formal contract with the cooperative to provide all necessary engineering and design services, including dealing with Wright, hiring architects, contractors and draftsmen, conferring with owners, setting design standards, preparing bid documents, keeping accounts, and overseeing construction of buildings, roads and other infrastructure. Between them, Henken and Resnick also designed twenty-six residences, or more than half of Usonia's original buildings. Their long connection with the community combined with their own understanding of Wright's principles of organic architecture and of the Usonian ideal are among the most important reasons that Usonia was developed with such faithfulness to Wright's plan and to his ideals.

Henken and Resnick also assembled a group of other architects for owners to consult with for designs. Because Wright would be reviewing all proposed work and in keeping with the community's dedication to Usonian principles, the majority were Taliesin fellows, including Theodore Bower, Kaneji Domoto, Alden B. Dow and Marcus Weston, Peter Berndtson, Cornelia Brierly, Gordon Chadwick, John Lautner and Edgar Tafel. Others included Robert Bishop of Philadelphia, Paul Schweiker of Roselle, Illinois, Charles Warner of New Jersey, Bernard Kessler and Delbert Larson. Only four members of this large group actually designed houses at Usonia (Bower, Domoto, Schweiker and Warner). Nevertheless, thirty-seven of Usonia's residences were designed by former apprentices or disciples of Wright, while two of the other seven houses (both Techbuilts) were remodeled by Wright-trained architects. Wright himself designed only three of the residences, houses for the

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Friedman (1949), Serlin (1950) and Reisely (1951) families. Although he had prepared designs for two others, the Millers and Auerbachs, they were never built, primarily due to financial concerns. In total, Wright and his apprentices and/or disciples designed more than 75 percent of the community's houses.

Wright fulfilled, at least in part, his mandated review of all proposed house designs. He took an active role in the design approval process for about the first dozen design approvals; however, his strong objections to a design by Kaneji Domoto sparked a prolonged dispute that ultimately (after Usonia approved construction of the Domoto house), caused a rift between Wright and the community that never completely healed. David Henken, who tried to intercede in the dispute and served as intermediary when Wright refused to review any more designs, lost the trust of both Wright and the Usonians, which led to the demise of the design panel itself. The following year, when the president of the cooperative tried to enforce Wright's contractual obligation to design review, the architect briefly returned to his role; however, further disputes over designs, fees and control brought his formal relationship with Usonia to an end.

Wright judged Domoto's work as both derivative of his own and influenced by the International style, which Wright believed to be the opposite of organic architecture in every way. However, the larger issue was that of design review at all, which proved worrisome for the some members of the community, who debated issues such as the fairness of requiring horizontal siding, clearly an important element in Wright's Usonian oeuvre, over vertical, which was cheaper. Some members felt that Wright's more complex designs of the 1950s, while still clearly Usonian, had diverged too far from the simpler Usonians of the early period (such as the Jacobs House) that had inspired them.⁴¹ Eventually, five Domoto designs were built at Usonia, and Wright demanded that the cooperative make it clear that he had not approved them. Other designs less in keeping with Wright's principles included two Techbuilt houses, from Carl Koch's innovative 1952 prefab kits, and at least one house,

⁴¹ Reisley, 79.

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the 1952 Miller House, designed by George Nemeny, that reflects the influence of the International style. Although the core members held fast to the Usonian principles, in general the community accepted these houses, with most members feeling that an absolutely faithful adherence to Wright's organic architecture was not necessary to preserve the community's way of life. As they did in several other areas, Usonians decided that compromise was more important to the health of the cooperative than conformity.

By the fall of 1947, members were eager to begin building. As Henken and Resnick began to prepare plans for infrastructure and utilities, building costs, driven by post-war shortages and demand, rose dramatically. More problematic, though most members had contributed their 40 percent, the cooperative was unable to secure financing for the remainder of the building costs. Not only did banks refuse to mortgage homes owned by a cooperative, but lenders were uneasy with the community's egalitarian membership, fearing that the presence of Jews, African Americans, socialists, and atheists would bring down property values. Conservative bankers also reacted negatively to modern architecture, which had not yet achieved the widespread popularity it would enjoy just a few years later. Such a consummate rejection of the cooperative's values and proposed lifestyle left members with few other options. Declaring their commitment to the original concept and believing that when the built homes were seen the financing would follow, they decided to pool their funds, a total of \$120,000, in order to build the first five houses, hoping to use those to leverage financing for the rest. The five houses chosen for construction, two in the northern part of the community and three near the southern end, were the Resnick and Benzer Residences, designed by Aaron Resnick, and the Ben Henken, Kepler, and Ralph Miller residences, designed by David Henken. Two more were subsequently built by members who secured independent funding. Construction began in July 1948, and a small stone pumphouse, the first building, was completed in 1949. The first residence was also completed that summer, and Aaron and Mildred Resnick, the first residents, were authorized to move in on July 13, 1949. They were followed by John and Jean Kepler, Sydney and Florence Benzer, Ralph and Clara Miller, and Rowland and Fay Watts.

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However, despite progress on construction, the shortage of funds grew more serious. Of those banks that expressed interest at all, most would only consider individual mortgages, an arrangement that threatened the very foundation of the community, which had been conceived around the idea of cooperative ownership. Thus, even as it grew desperate for funds, the community was loathe to give up this ideal. In 1949, Usonia turned to the FHA's special cooperative housing division, gaining access to a number of high-level FHA executives in Washington. As detailed applications and financial data were submitted, the community was optimistic; however, the FHA eventually informed the community that it would not act on the application because Usonia's monthly rents exceeded the FHA's limits for low-cost assistance.

Eventually one institution, Knickerbocker Federal Savings and Loan Association of New York City, agreed to give Usonia a group mortgage. Louis T. Boecher, the bank's president, expressed his confidence in the fact that the homes designed by Wright were "twenty to thirty years ahead of their time" and claimed to be "banking on the future." He also praised the group for "setting a new pace in both cooperative ownership and architectural design."⁴² Usonia turned to Dorothy Kenyon, a New York City lawyer, judge, and social activist, to help it negotiate the intricate details of the transaction, which was arranged so that Knickerbocker wrote a separate note on each house, and the cooperative held all the notes.⁴³ Members made monthly payments to the coop, which managed all payments, taxes, etc. and maintained roads and services. Each owner received a ninety-nine-year lease and was solely responsible if the coop defaulted. However, when owners wanted to withdraw, their homes would revert to the cooperative and the owner would receive any equity plus their share of the profits. In order to secure badly needed funds, Usonia sought the largest possible mortgages it could get on each house, giving the cooperative extra funds to shift between building projects as needed.

⁴² Louis T. Boecher, quoted in *Architectural Forum*, in Reisley, 56.

⁴³ Kenyon was an important supporter of liberal and progressive causes in the early twentieth century. She worked for women's rights, civil rights, union rights, and numerous other causes and was a lifelong advocate of cooperatives. Her criticism of Sen. Joseph McCarthy resulted in an investigation of her ties to Communist organizations, but she was cleared of all charges.

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Although willing to go along with the radical idea of cooperative ownership, Knickerbocker was uncomfortable with the unusual circular building lots, and the surveyors claimed difficulty in filing them with the town. Although the surveyors wanted rectangles, Henken worked out a scheme in which the lots were carefully redrawn as hexagons or polygons. In essence, Henken and Resnick redrew each lot just enough to achieve a polygonal shape in place of a circular one. Although legally the circular parcels no longer existed, the change affected their definition more than their design or the visual integrity of Wright's plan, as the Usonians intended to retain circular building sites and the original concept of leaving uncleared land between them.

Even as the Usonians prepared to build, local utilities, insurance companies and the fire department continued to present obstacles. In a period when home ownership became both economical and easy for middle-class Americans, these citizens, who had devoted years to planning their community, negotiating the values that they would live by, pooling their resources, working with architects, and even participating in the building process, were perceived with suspicion, encountering obstacles from every authority. The experience of the Usonians presents a decided contrast with that of those who purchased homes at Levittown, where veterans could obtain mortgages in an hour. Despite their "radical" conception of property, many of the Usonians were also veterans who, because of their desire to live in individually designed organic homes, relinquished the generous veterans benefits granted by the U.S. government. Nevertheless, despite many setbacks, contracts began to be let for infrastructure, and members were able to select architects and begin the design process. Robert Chuckrow Construction Co., of Hartsdale, New York, was initially selected as the builder for the community; however, Usonia later terminated his contract in favor of using multiple builders. David Henken also formed a building company (Henken Builds) and was responsible for building his own designs and a number of others, including the Wright-designed Reisley House. Harold Turner, an experienced builder of Wright's Usonian houses, also participated in building some of the structures, notably the Serlin House, another of the Wright designs. In order to economize, some materials were purchased in bulk and cooperators helped out with construction,

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primarily with unskilled tasks such as clearing, moving materials, creating gravel beds for the radiant heat, preparing trenches and laying pipe for the water system. Weekends were spent at the site working in groups. These labor parties also served as social events and community bonding exercises, laying the foundation not only for the buildings but for the social underpinnings of the community. By the end of 1949, seven more houses had been completed. The new residents of Usonia included the Henken clan: David and Priscilla, Ben and Frida (David's parents), and Judy and Odif Podel (sister and brother-in-law), as well as Herbert and Ada Brandon, Arthur and Gertrude Bier, and Bill and Esther Harris. Three more couples moved in during the fall of 1950. In the same year, a covenant for Usonia was drawn up that became part of all member deeds; it codified such guidelines as the common ownership of all the lands and facilities, the fact that all residences were to be year round, that no fences, either built or living, were allowed, and that there would be no livestock.⁴⁴

As development continued, with more than thirty houses built or under construction by 1953, the early 1950s proved a test of the community's idealism. Most of the problems arose from a combination of rising costs and funding shortages (both by the cooperative and by individual members), the cooperative's complicated financial arrangement, the extra effort needed to coordinate the construction of innovative designs with inexperienced builders, and the difficulties of maintaining the delicate balance among members – with their different degrees of understanding and commitment to core principles and the variables they brought to practical matters such as time and money. Essentially, the grand ideals of the founding members proved taxing to effect on a day to day basis. As had happened several times during Usonia's formative years, these challenges separated the more idealistic members, who were determined to stick to the founding ideals at all costs, from those who were practical about the kind of compromises that might have to be made to bring a viable community into being.

⁴⁴ Cornan, 44.

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This time, however, despite strong objections from some of the founding members, a majority of members agreed to consider redefining the cooperative financial structure of the community. The wrenching decision to divide the cooperative into individually owned parcels was ultimately influenced by the cooperative's fragile financial footing, which many believed threatened its economic survival. In addition, Usonia's complicated process of shifting mortgage money to build cooperatively owned houses on a shoestring budget had led it into enormous debt, so much so that it couldn't re-pay departing members their shares. If Usonia could not find a way to gain solid financial footing, it would be unable to recruit new members or to complete the community as planned. Although it took several years to reach this conclusion, by 1955 the majority of members were in favor of private ownership of the land. By a close vote, Usonia Homes: A Cooperative, Inc., legally became Usonia Homes, Incorporated, and each member received a deed of ownership for his/her property and shares of stock in the new cooperative.⁴⁵

Perhaps the most unfortunate consequence of this process was its effect on David Henken, whose disillusionment led him eventually to withdraw from membership in the association. Another disappointment occurred in 1955, when Wright refused further approval of Usonia's drawings. The cooperative attempted to compensate for this by amending its bylaws to require "Wrightian architectural standards." This vague statement was supported by the requirement that new designs, or changes to existing structures, would require the approval of the board of directors."⁴⁶ Even after private ownership had supplanted cooperative tenure, members retained a strong commitment to preserving the original design ideals.

By 1955, Wright's plan was fully developed, with thirty-six single family homes that embodied or at least acknowledged the Usonian principles. Now, members initiated one last change to the plan, proposing to eliminate some of the landlocked interspaces between lots (as well as incorporating driveway rights of way over

⁴⁵ Reisley, 90.

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community land) by portioning them to each lot, which would be increased to 1.25 acres in size. Although seven families sued to prevent this alteration to the original plan, believing that the original circle should remain the defined building site, the changed was passed and the number of lots was reduced from fifty to forty-seven. Restrictive covenants still ensured that any changes required a 100 percent approval of the board of directors, and the cooperative still held ownership of forty acres of common land, roads, and water. Again, this change had little effect on the visual effect of Wright's design, since it had been almost completely built according to plan and since restrictions on fences and other artificial lot lines remained in place. The community continued to recommend, though not require, that buildings be constructed within the original circles. The community's policies were redefined under a set of restrictive covenants, renewable every twenty years, that require 100 percent owner approval to change. No changes have been made since 1955. Eight more families joined by 1957 and the last three by 1963, bringing Usonia to full membership of forty-seven families.

Despite the very real difficulties encountered by the Usonians in trying to establish a truly cooperative community in an overwhelmingly capitalist society, by and large, the members succeeded to an extraordinary degree. As one member observed during the debate over cooperative ownership, "We should do away with cooperative ownership of the houses....Meanwhile, we can still really be a cooperative in all the ways that count....We depend on each other. We can still share things, do things together, still have community."⁴⁷

Architecture

In the post-World War II era the erection of single-family suburban houses in the United States contributed to the greatest building boom in the history of the country. Although there were many reasons for this, the seriousness of the housing shortage made new construction a priority for the government, which supported

⁴⁶ Reisley, 89.

⁴⁷ Sid Miller, in Reisley, 89.

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policies, programs and incentives that shaped the location and type of housing constructed. The stated objective of the Housing Act of 1949 was "the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family."⁴⁸ Although some government programs paid token attention to the problems of the lower classes and/or to the provision of multifamily housing in urban areas, most greatly favored middle-class white families building new homes in the suburbs, and as houses and developments proliferated, architects and builders experimented with new styles, materials and methods of production. Among many noteworthy efforts were those that promoted solving the housing crises through standardization (Levittown), prefabrication and innovative materials (Lustron, Techbuilt), so-called "good design (Case Study Houses, Idea Houses), awards and competitions (sponsored by *Architectural Record*, *Progressive Architecture* and *Architectural Forum*), "how to" books and articles (*Tomorrow's House: How to Plan and Built your Post War Home* (1945, George Nelson and Henry Wright), and show houses and prototypes.

In its three massive subdivisions the Levitt company constructed small, simple houses with slight stylistic variables, prefabricated interchangeable components, and standardized mechanical systems on the assembly line model. These houses (the basic model was 800 square feet and sold for \$7,990) were above all intended to be affordable, and although the overall appearance relied on more or less traditional design idioms, Leavitt's houses incorporated several features that Wright had pioneered in the 1936 Usonian, including a slab foundation, radiant heat, central fireplaces, open plans, and double-glazed sliding windows and doors,

Marcel Breuer, Carl Strandland (Lustron), and Frank Lloyd Wright all designed and built prototypical exhibit houses in Manhattan between 1949 and 1953. Breuer's was commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art and constructed in the museum's garden in 1949. The museum's charge to Breuer was to design a moderately

⁴⁸ in Wright, *Building the Dream*, 246.

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priced house for person living on the outskirts of an urban area and commuting to the city.⁴⁹ The exhibit was supposedly prompted by a model for Carl Strandlund's all-metal Lustron house that had been constructed several blocks away. The Lustron was a small, rectangular, porcelain-enameled steel house that was manufactured on an assembly line and delivered to the building site on one truck. Strandlund sought to take advantage of new materials, clever marketing, and mass production to help solve the housing crisis. Apparently Philip Johnson, MoMA's curator of architecture, was displeased with the favorable media and crowds that were drawn to the Lustron and decided to exhibit a moderately priced house that also exemplified good modern design.⁵⁰ Breuer's design was a clear illustration of modern design, defined by its rectilinear form, clean lines, broad expanses of glass, lack of applied ornament, and flexible plan. It also promoted the use of common materials such as plywood paneling, and it illustrated the distinctive butterfly roof and zoned plan that became the signatures of Breuer's residential work.

In 1953, Wright constructed a demonstration Usonian house on the site of the Guggenheim before the museum was constructed.⁵¹ Like Breuer's, Wright's model had clear modern lines; however, like the houses he was building in Usonia, the model boasted a more organic connection to site, a continuity of pattern, materials and design, a greater plasticity of form, and natural materials inside and out. It also included rooms designed with maximum views of the outdoors, a large central fireplace, and built-in storage spaces and furniture. In 1954 Wright published *The Natural House*, specifically demonstrating how his principles of organic design could be applied to the single family house.

⁴⁹ Arthur J. Pulos, *The American Design Adventure, 1940-1975* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988), 64-5.

⁵⁰ "The Prefab House comes under Scrutiny at New York's MoMA," *Architectural Review*, 1 October 2008.

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m3575/is_1340_224?ai_n31176556/

⁵¹ David Henken was in charge of erecting this prototype.

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The effects of so much media attention on these and other aspects of contemporary design introduced modernism to the middle-class consumer and made it not only acceptable but desirable to the home buyer. A 1945 survey in the *Saturday Evening Post* revealed that only 14 percent of respondents wanted to live in an apartment or a "used" house. The *Post* concluded that post-war home buyers wanted new houses, modern floor plans, contemporary materials, and the latest appliances.⁵² Desirable features included picture windows, sliding glass doors, open floor plans, zoned planning, and especially a "private outdoor living room," or back yard, to encourage family centered activities.⁵³ Despite growing public enthusiasm for modern forms and materials, government agencies such as the FHA remained suspicious of them, instructing evaluators to lower the scores of buildings with flat roofs and plain facades, which effectively (as we have seen with Wright's work) kept more daring examples of modernism in check. Nevertheless, by the early 1950s, the basic principles of modern design had infiltrated the average builder's catalogue, and most new single family houses were organized horizontally, featured open interiors with zoned planning, and incorporated modern materials and technology. These, of course, were features that Wright had introduced in the mid-1930s when he created the Usonian house. Yet, the most popular American contemporary house type of the 1960s was the more conservative looking ranch house, which melded modern design with more traditional features, such as pitched roofs, clapboard, shutters, and wide porches.

Frank Lloyd Wright made major contributions to the development of contemporary American residential architecture. From the ubiquitous ranch to the ultra-standardized Levittown house, much of the architecture of suburban America is indebted to his ideas. Yet, examples of his own residential work or those designed using the principles of organic architecture that he championed in the 1950s are relatively rarer. Only approximately 100 Wright-designed Usonian houses were built, though plans for many more exist. Wright's comparative lack

⁵² Wright, *Building the Dream*, 253.

⁵³ Wright, *Building the Dream*, 254.

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of success in this area may be attributed to the fact that he never achieved the affordability he sought. Or perhaps it was that his designs did not lend themselves to speedy construction or standardization, that they required skilled craftsmanship, or that potential patrons were unable to get government supported mortgages. For whatever combination of reasons, Wright's contribution to American residential architecture is not adequately represented in his oeuvre. Thus, the fact that more than forty examples of Wright designed or influenced residences were built in the suburban town of Mount Pleasant is a significant landmark in the history of modern architecture.

Despite the different architects involved with Usonia over the years, Wright's influence can be seen in almost every residence constructed at Usonia. In part this is because he and his apprentices and/or disciples designed more than 75 percent of the houses, and Wright actively participated in design review for the first dozen or so houses built at Usonia. Most important is the fact that the cooperators incorporated his principles of organic architecture into the community's founding doctrines and continued to hold to them long after the cooperative itself had changed in fundamental ways. Like Wright, they believed that the Usonian house expressed a harmony of idea and object, that a house could give form to the sovereign self and symbolize the individual's place in society and that the qualities of architectural design would form protective enclosures around families that would help them live out the tenets of democracy more fully: the citizen of Usonia would be more free, more fair, and more just. The longevity of the community association, the continuity of residency and ownership, and the integrity of the plan and architecture testify to the fact that the members' expectations were largely met.

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- Pulos, Arthur J. *The American Design Adventure, 1940-1975*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988.
- Reisley, Roland. *Usonia, New York: Building a Community with Frank Lloyd Wright*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001.
- Sanchis, Frank. *American Architecture, Westchester County, New York: Colonial to Contemporary*. n.p.: Harbor Hill Books, 1977.
- Seargent, John. *Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses*. New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1984.
- Siegler, Richard and Herbert J. Levy. "Brief History of Cooperative Housing." *Cooperative Housing Journal*. 1986.
- Wright, Gwendolyn. *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981.
- Wright, Frank Lloyd. *An Autobiography*. New York: Horizon Press, 1932.
- _____. *The Natural House*. New York: Horizon Press, 1954.

Usonia Historic District

Name of Property

Westchester County, New York

County and State

10. Geographical DataAcreage of property 95.10 acres**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

1 18
Zone Easting Northing
2

3
Zone Easting Northing
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 Byname/title Kathleen LaFrank, National Register Coordinator (see continuation sheet)organization New York State Historic Preservation Office date March 2012street & number Peebles Island State Park, Box 189 telephone 518-237-8643 x 3261city or town Waterford state New York zip code 12188**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 Various

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Usonia Historic District
Pleasantville, Westchester County, NY

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1

UTM References - -All Zone 18

1. 604996/4554289
2. 605161/4554054
3. 605244/4553806
4. 605300/4553484
5. 605411/4553009
6. 605233/4552983
7. 605107/4553017
8. 604970/4553419
9. 604885/4553455
10. 604857/4553672
11. 604772/4554121
12. 604774/4554175
13. 604795/4554232
14. 604823/4554296

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification

The boundary was drawn to include the original ninety-seven-acre parcel purchased by Usonia Homes: A Cooperative, Inc. in 1948 and one additional adjacent lot incorporated into the community during the period of significance. The nominated area retains an outstanding level of integrity to its original plan, with site plan, roads, building lots, buildings, and vegetation intact.

See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Usonia Historic District
Pleasantville, Westchester County, NY

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 11 Page 1

Preliminary draft of Item 7 and building list prepared by:

Jess Ouwerkerk
Columbia University Preservation Program
For: Westchester County Historical Society

Revised nomination and Item 8 prepared by

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register coordinator
New York SHPO

Substantial oral history provided by:

Roland Reisley
44 Usonia Road
Pleasantville, NY

See continuation sheet

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Usonia Historic District
Pleasantville, Westchester County, NY

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number photos Page 1

Photographer: Jess Ouwerkerk
Westchester County Historical Society
2199 Saw Mill River Road
Elmsford, NY 10523

Date: 2011

Tiff Files: CD-R of .tiff files on file at
National Park Service
Washington DC

and

New York SHPO
PO Box 189
Waterford, NY 12188

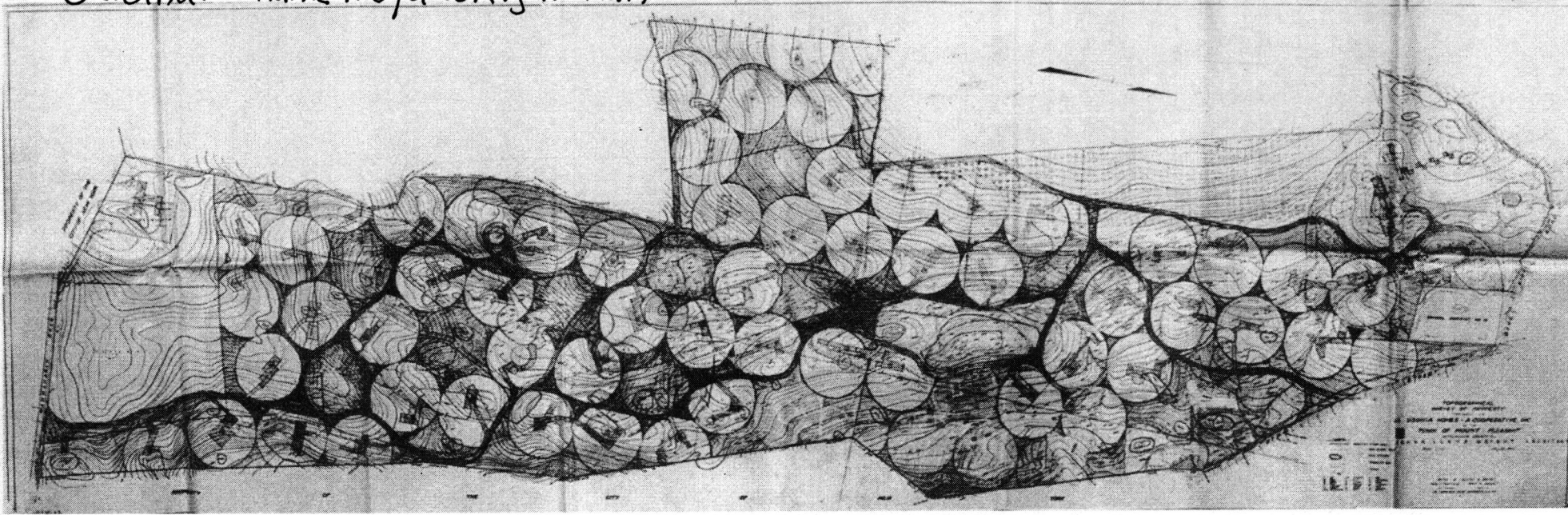
Photo List:

- 0001: 26 Usonia Road, Site 26
- 0002: 3 Laurel Hill Drive, Site 19
- 0003: 2 Usonia Road, Site 4
- 0004: 1010 King Street, Site 1
- 0005: 6 Bayberry Drive, Site 52
- 0006: 16 Usonia Road, Site 16
- 0007: 8 Usonia Road, Site 9
- 0008: 12 Laurel Hill Drive, Site 28
- 0009: 29 Usonia Road, Site 43
- 0010: 38 Usonia Road, Site 29
- 0011: 19 Usonia Road, Site 24
- 0012: 44 Usonia Road, Site 48
- 0013: 44 Usonia Road, interior, living room
- 0014: 44 Usonia Road, interior, master bedroom
- 0015: typical district road
- 0016: typical district landscape

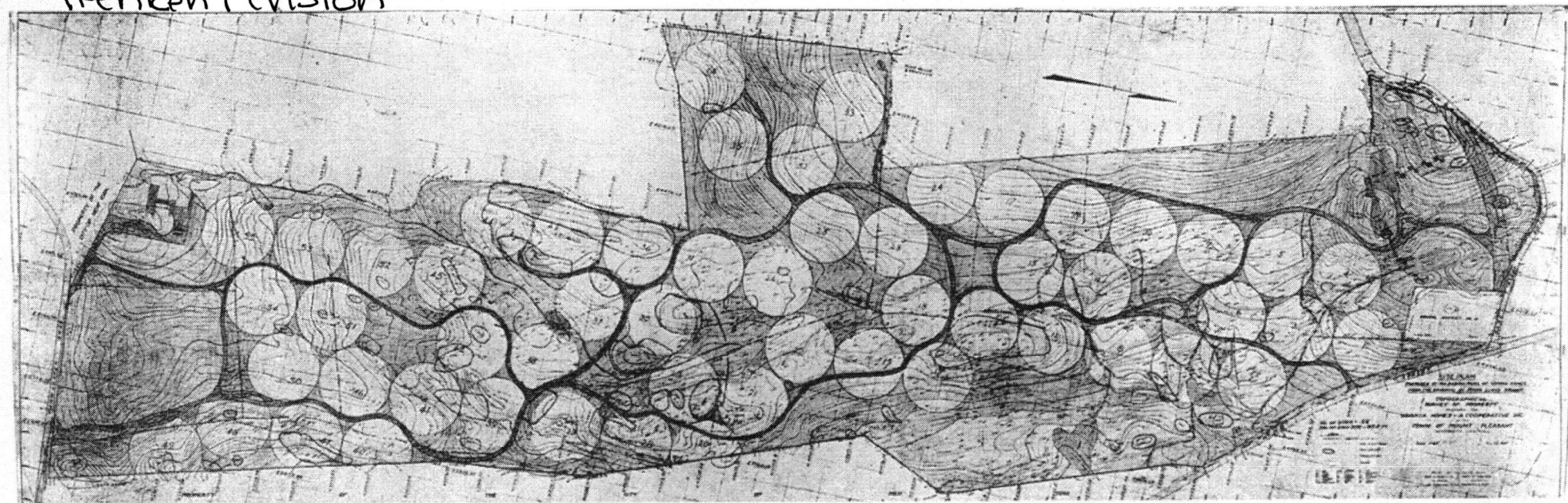
See continuation sheet

Usonia Historic District
Pleasantville Vic. Westchester Co. NY

Original Frank Lloyd Wright Plan



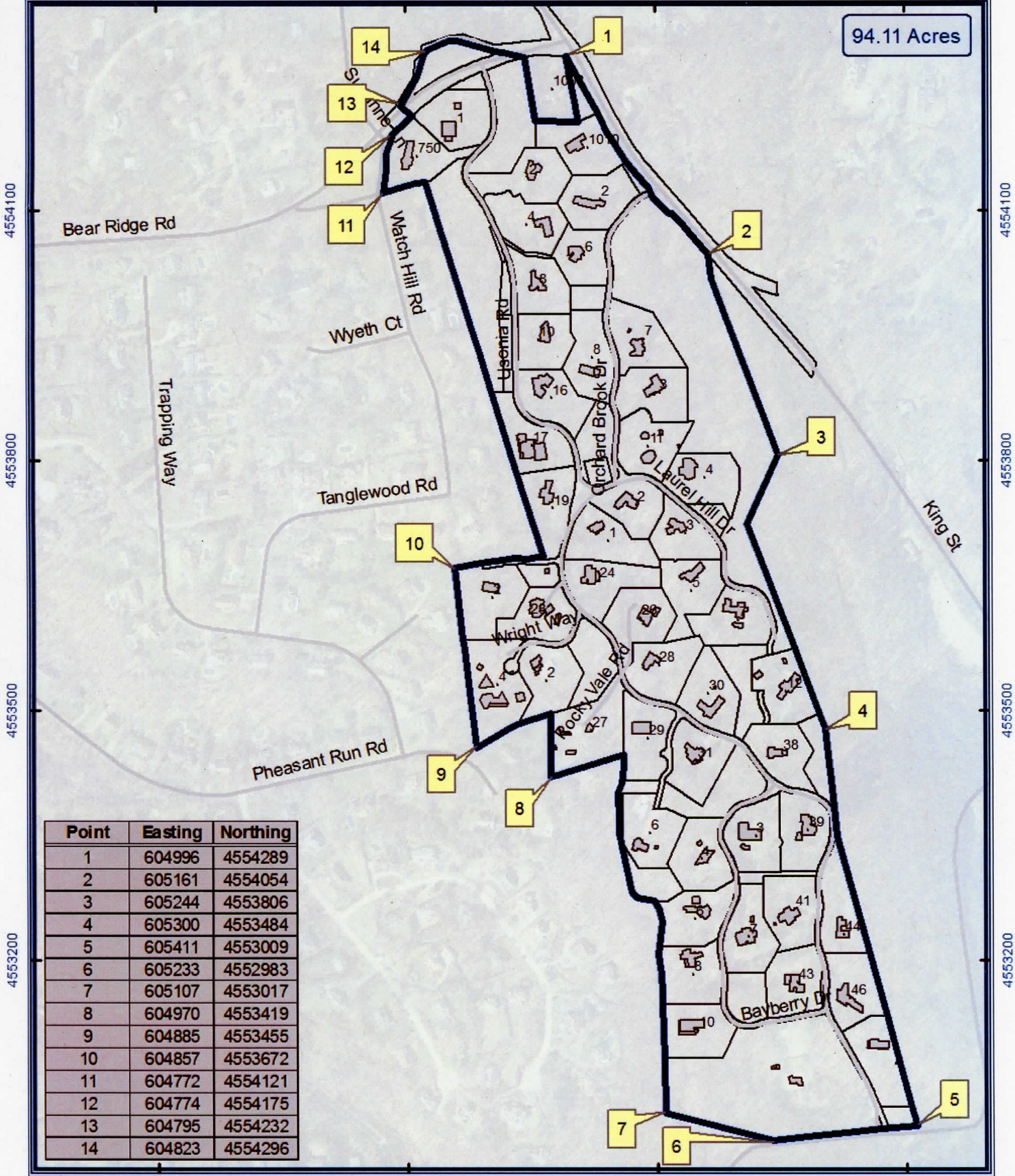
Henken revision



Usonia Historic District

Town of Mt. Pleasant
Westchester County, NY

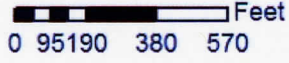
94.11 Acres



Point	Easting	Northing
1	604996	4554289
2	605161	4554054
3	605244	4553806
4	605300	4553484
5	605411	4553009
6	605233	4552983
7	605107	4553017
8	604970	4553419
9	604885	4553455
10	604857	4553672
11	604772	4554121
12	604774	4554175
13	604795	4554232
14	604823	4554296



1:6,000
1 in = 500 ft



Usonia Historic District

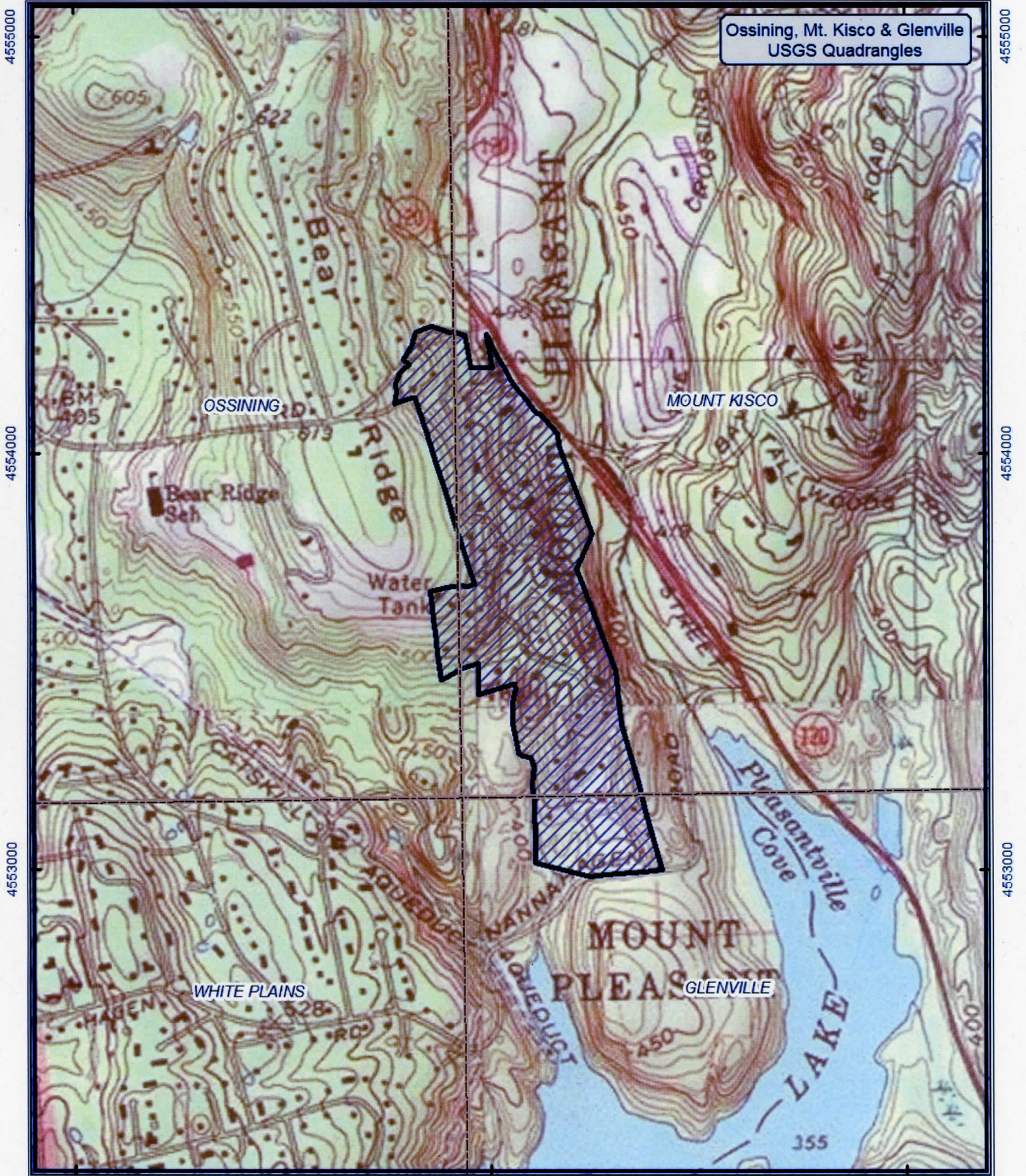
Tax Parcel Data:
Westchester Co. RPS
<http://giswww.westchestergov.com>



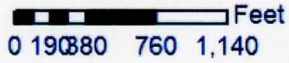
Datum: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N

Usonia Historic District

Town of Mt. Pleasant
Westchester County, NY





1:12,000
1 in = 1,000 ft



Datum: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N

604000

 Usonia Historic District
 quadindx

606000

USGS Topo Quadrangle from:
Services@arcgisonline.com



Friedman House
11 Orchard Brook Dr.
Site 14



MAP KEY

- 3 Bayberry Drive = 42
- 4 Bayberry Drive = 45
- 6 Bayberry Drive = 52
- 7 Bayberry Drive = 51
- 8 Bayberry Drive = 53
- 10 Bayberry Drive = 55

750 Bear Ridge Drive = 57

2 Hemlock Drive = 33

1010 King Street = 1

- 1 Laurel Hill Drive = 23
- 2 Laurel Hill Drive = 18
- 3 Laurel Hill Drive = 19
- 4 Laurel Hill Drive = 13
- 5 Laurel Hill Drive = 22
- 7 Laurel Hill Drive = 21
- 12 Laurel Hill Drive = 28

- 2 Orchard Brook Drive = 3
- 7 Orchard Brook Drive = 8
- 8 Orchard Brook Drive = 11
- 9 Orchard Brook Drive = 12
- 11 Orchard Brook Drive = 14

6 Rocky Vale Road = 44


- 1 Usonia Road = 58
- 2 Usonia Road = 4
- 4 Usonia Road = 5
- 6 Usonia Road = 6
- 8 Usonia Road = 9
- 10 Usonia Road = 10
- 16 Usonia Road = 16
- 17 Usonia Road = 17
- 19 Usonia Road = 24
- 23 Usonia Road = 32
- 24 Usonia Road = 25
- 26 Usonia Road = 26
- 27 Usonia Road = A
- 28 Usonia Road = 31
- 29 Usonia Road = 43
- 30 Usonia Road = 30
- 31 Usonia Road = 37
- 38 Usonia Road = 29
- 39 Usonia Road = 39
- 41 Usonia Road = 46
- 42 Usonia Road = 47
- 43 Usonia Road = 50
- 44 Usonia Road = 48
- 46 Usonia Road = 49

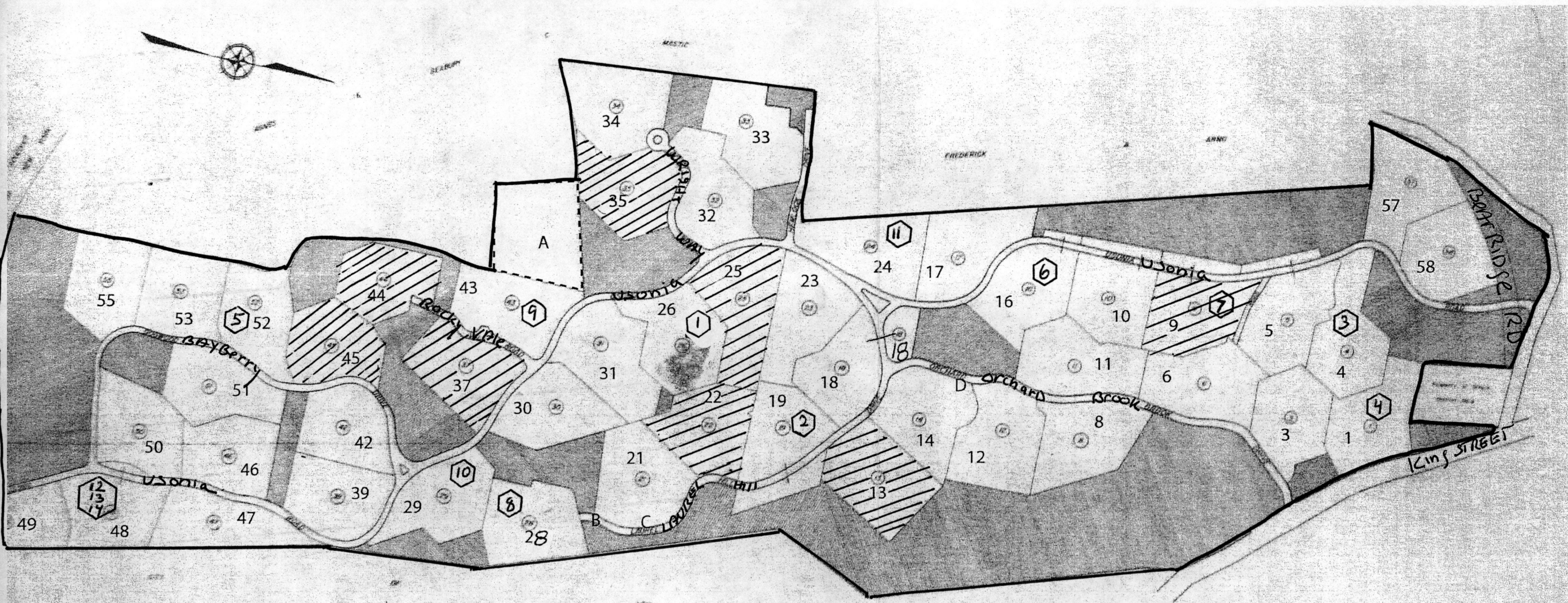
- 2 Wright Way = 35
- 4 Wright Way = 34

USONIA HISTORIC DISTRICT
PLEASANTVILLE VICINITY, WESTCHESTER COUNTY, NEW YORK

Numbers = Usonia Lot Numbers; see address key

Non-contributing = ///

Photos = 



NOT TO SCALE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Usonia Historic District
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, Westchester

DATE RECEIVED: 7/20/12 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 8/20/12
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 9/04/12 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 9/05/12
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 12000600

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: Y

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 9/5/12 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER *Abundant* DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville vic

Westchester Co NY

0001



Usonic Historic District
Pleasantville Vic
Westchester Co NY

0002



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville Vic

Westchester Co NY

0003



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville vic.

Westchester Co NY

0004



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville vic

Westchester Co NY

0005



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville vic

Westchester Co NY

0606



Usonia Historic District
Pleasantville vic.

Westchester Co NY

0607 (non-contributing)



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville vic.

Westchester Co NY

0008



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville vic

Westchester Co NY

0009



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville vic

Westchester Co NY

6060



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville vic

Westchester Co NY

0011



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville vic

Westchester Co NY

0012



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville VIC

Westchester Co NY

0013



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville vic

Westchester Co NY

0014

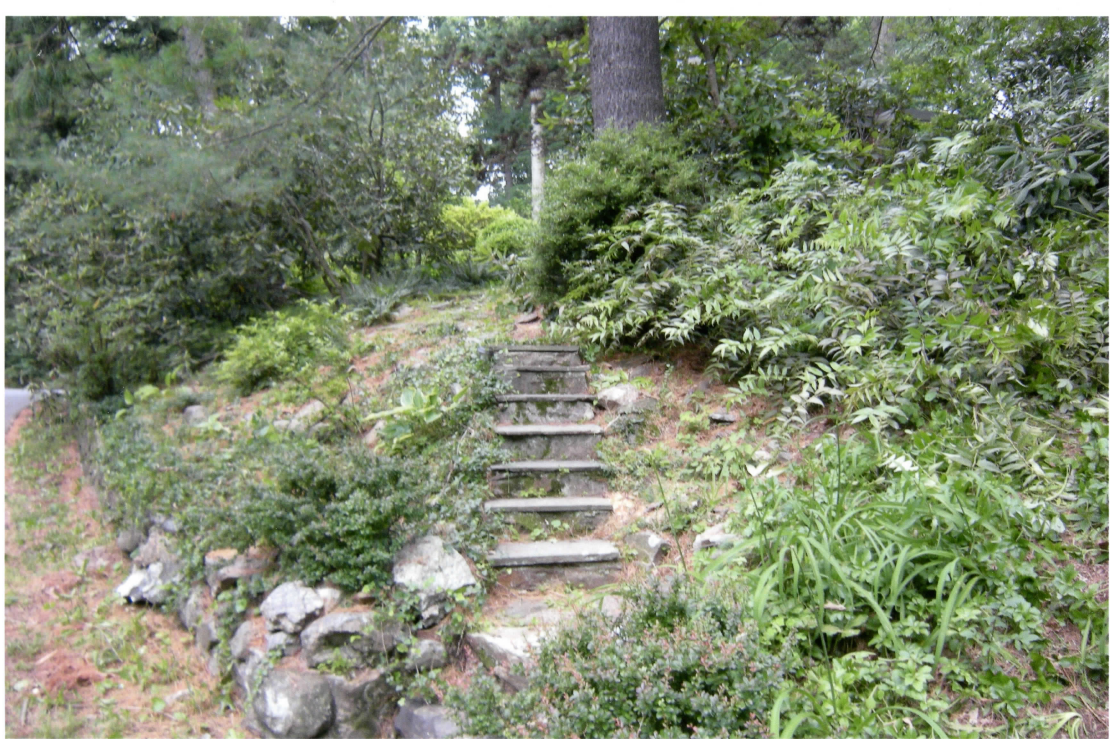


Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville, VIC

Westchester Co NY

2015



Usonia Historic District

Pleasantville vic.

Westchester Co NY

2016

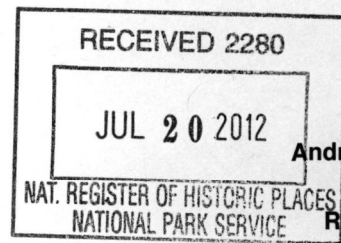


New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau • Peebles Island, PO Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189

518-237-8643

www.nysparks.com



Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

Rose Harvey
Commissioner

11 July 2012

Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nominations

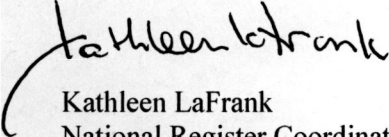
Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to enclose the following three National Register nominations to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Usonia Historic District, Westchester County
The White House, Otsego County
Holy Rosary Church Complex, Monroe County

Thank you for your assistance in processing these proposals. Please feel free to call me at 518.237.8643 x 3261 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:


Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office