

Wisconsin Historical Society: Melster House listed in the National Register of Historic Places

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Waukesha, Waukesha County, Wisconsin – The Wisconsin Historical Society announces the listing of the Melster House in the National Register of Historic Places on March 10, 2023.

Between 1950 and 1960, the population of Waukesha grew approximately 30%; among those moving to the city during this period was the John Melster family. Melster, along with his business partner, had recently moved their company—Dairyland Food Laboratories—to Waukesha, and he wanted to live closer to work. The Melsters selected Racine-based John Randal McDonald as their architect and received a Contemporary style house design that was integrated into the existing hill and allowed for the retention of many of the existing trees. Constructed in 1955, the house exhibits strong horizontal lines through flat rooflines with overhanging eaves, a cantilevered balcony, and large expanses of glass. The house continues to be a striking contrast to the more traditionally styled houses in the neighborhood. The Melster House was identified in a city-wide survey as one of two Contemporary style single-family residences constructed in the 1950s with exceptional design features that remain intact.

Two years after the Melster House was completed, the drawings were identified as plan #1914 and offered for purchase in the bi-annual publication, *New Homes Guide*. Although the exterior was composed of brick instead of concrete blocks and the front door was placed off-center, plan #1914, entitled “spectacular hilltop house,” was the same as the Melster plans. To date, two examples of plan #1914 have been identified; one in Minnesota and another in Michigan. Between 1955 and 1958, McDonald would have ten other plans published in that same publication,

built examples of which have been found in a total of seven states, including Wisconsin.

Additional information for the Underwriters Exchange Building is available at:

<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/NationalRegister/NR2739>

To learn more about the State and National Register programs in Wisconsin, visit: <https://wisconsinhistory.org/hp/register/>

About the Wisconsin Historical Society

The Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1846, ranks as one of the largest, most active and most diversified state historical societies in the nation. As both a state agency and a private membership organization, its mission is to help people connect to the past by collecting, preserving and sharing stories. The Wisconsin Historical Society serves millions of people every year through a wide range of sites, programs and services. For more information, visit wisconsinhistory.org.