

I. ED WILE HOUSE
626 Wilder Place
Shreveport
Caddo Parish
Louisiana

HABS LA-190
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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I. ED WILE HOUSE

HABS No. LA-190

Location: 626 Wilder Place between Dillingham and Creswell Avenues, Shreveport, Caddo Parish, Louisiana.

Significance: The I. Ed Wile House, designed in 1934 by Samuel Gross Wiener, III of the architectural firm Jones, Roessle, Olschner, and Weiner, is the oldest known extant International Style house in Louisiana. Shreveport boasts the largest and most significant collection of early modern (pre World War II) structures in the State of which the I. Ed Wile House is certainly one of the most celebrated.

Description: The Wile house is a two story International Style structure with a smooth white cement plaster (stucco) exterior wall finish with red brick accents, a flat roof, and industrial steel casement windows. The first floor is elevated above a crawl space and is structured with wood joists supported by a matrix of rectangular reinforced concrete beams over square concrete piling.

The L-shaped plan of the house has a number of small protrusions that not only provide visual interest but also opportunities for the placement of corner windows. Many of the casement windows on the second floor include an inoperable transom with the center muntin omitted. The casement window in the master bathroom inverts the inoperable transom so that it occurs below the operable sashes. The inoperable panel contains obscure glazing which provides visual privacy from the street. The typical window detail places the steel framed casement windows about 1 1/2" beyond the surface of the cement plaster (stucco). The protrusion allows the window to act as a drip keeping some of the condensation off of the cement plaster (stucco) wall finish. The steel components of the casement windows were originally painted black and were later changed to blue during the Wile's tenure in the house.

Brick accents occur surrounding the large expanse of casement windows in the living room, the service porch, and at the breakfast room. The brick coursing has horizontal bands of rowlocks separated by four courses of running bond. At outside corners, the rowlocks are replaced with two stretchers that are cut down to match the height of the rowlock. This corner detail prevents the masonry core holes from being exposed and doesn't interrupt the vertical coursing.

The main entrance to the house occurs in a recess under the second floor and includes a very thin horizontal overhang extending to the east which is supported by an exposed pipe column. The presence of the horizontal

overhang cleverly dissolves the massiveness of the second floor located above the recess while providing protection against the elements.

The house is primarily structured using wood balloon frame bearing walls. Large openings and corner window conditions are framed using steel beams in conjunction with the wood stud framing. The roof is supported by 4'-0" +/- deep parallel chord trusses at 24" o.c. which were fabricated on site. The top and bottom chords are fashioned from 2x6's and the vertical and diagonal members are fashioned from 1x4's and 1x6's respectively. The thickness of the truss allows the hot air to stratify and thus insulating the house from heat gain coming from the roof surface. The excess heat is expelled from the attic through a series of large gravity vents.

The ventilation strategy for the house is fairly simple... fresh air enters the house through the open casements and travels to the open stairwell area and up to an attic fan. The attic fan didn't discharge the air into the attic but rather to the exterior through a roof mounted fan house near the exterior wall at the rear of the house. The fan house and fan have been removed but the remnants are still visible within the attic space.

A protruding piece of metal flashing (made in three pieces) is used at the intersection of the wall and roof planes. The flashing adds a shadow line detail which provides a defined edge to the top of the cement plaster (stucco) wall. The flashing was originally painted red and was changed to blue early on probably so that Wile could differentiate his house from Sam Wiener's own house (HABS No. LA-1362) designed in 1937 with its full range of red accents including the roof edge flashing.

History:

I. Ed Wile organized the Big Chain Company in 1922 as a subsidiary of the Wiener-Loeb Grocery Company founded in 1896 by his uncle Samuel G. Wiener, Jr. Only one year later in 1923, Wile together with two other investors purchased the Big Chain and the parent Wiener-Loeb Grocery Company outright. Under Wile's leadership, the Big Chain flourished and ultimately grew to eight stores throughout Shreveport making Wile a wealthy man. In 1928-29, Wile contracted with his first cousin, Samuel Gross Wiener, III, to design his new Big Chain Store on Fairfield Avenue. The Fairfield Big Chain was highly decorative and was typical of Wiener's work prior to 1931 when he embraced Art Deco or Romanesque styles.

In 1931, Sam Wiener, his wife Marion, and their mutual friend Theodore Flaxman took a voyage of discovery to Europe where they visited the 1931 Building Exposition, the Bauhaus, and met with a number of the notable

polemical architects of the day. William Wiener didn't accompany the trio on this trip because he was matriculating at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture. It was the influence of this trip that altered the trajectory of the practices of Sam Wiener, Theodore Flaxman, and by extension, William B. Wiener into a modern direction. Wile was aware of his cousin's change in stylistic direction and was apparently intrigued leading him to contract, once again, with his cousin to design a house for him and his family.

In 1933, Ed Wile acquired a 100' x 150' lot in the Glenwood Park subdivision of South Highlands for his family's new home. Wile purchased the property from Colonel Wilder who owned several acres of land bound by Line Ave, Wilder Place, Elmwood Ave, and Creswell Ave. Wilder built his own house in the development in the late 1920's and subdivided the remaining land into residential lots for sale. Wilder lived at 701 Wilder at the corner of Dillingham and Wilder Place within sight of the lot he sold to Wile at 626 Wilder Place. Wile's daughter Mimi recalled that Wilder told her father: "had I known what kind of house you were going to build, I wouldn't have sold you the lot." The area developed by Colonel Wilder is still visible today by the conspicuous presence of multiple decorative brick pillars marking each vehicular intersection.

In early 1934, Samuel Gross Wiener, III of the firm Jones, Roessle, Olschner and Wiener designed the I. Ed Wile house. The house was drastically different than anything seen in Shreveport up until that point; it caused quite a sensation in the community. Many people believed it to be a model or prototype for some kind of "house of the future", and felt free walk in and around the home as if it was in the public domain. Eventually, Ed Wile hired off-duty policemen to keep people from wandering onto the property and into his house.

Between 1952 and 1957, several modifications to the house occurred, or were proposed. All of these were designed by Samuel Wiener's half-brother and frequent collaborator, William B. Wiener. Except for these alterations and small cosmetic changes mostly affecting finishes, the house remains much as it did when it was originally occupied in 1934.

Both Sam and Bill Wiener had a number of projects published in the periodicals of the day... namely Architectural Record and Architectural Forum. The Wiener brothers saw publication as a way of having their work peer reviewed and as a way of advertising the output of their respective practices. The A.I.A. code of ethics prohibited architects from advertising their services to the general public, but did not preclude the publication of

work in professional journals. The I. Ed Wile house was published in the October 1934 issue of Architectural Record.

On a side note, Wile once again hired Sam Wiener and William B. Wiener in 1940 to design the flagship Big Chain store in Broadmoor, (HABS No. LA-1325). The design of this store was so unique and visionary that it is considered one of the most influential supermarket designs in the United States.

Evolution:

- 1934 - Initial design by Samuel G. Wiener, III.
- Au pair's quarters added on the second floor above the service porch. This addition was probably constructed between 1934 and 1937 when the Wiles' second daughter, Mimi, was born.
- 1938 - Addition designed by Samuel G. Wiener, III. (This addition included a first floor half bath, a second floor playroom and screened porch over an open patio on the first floor. The first floor half bath was the only portion of the design that was completed.)
- 1939 - Sam Wiener revised the playroom addition and eliminated the screened porch. (This revision was not built)
- Central HVAC added at some point between 1946 and 1952 making it among the first houses in Shreveport to have central air conditioning.
- 1952 - Kitchen remodeling design by William B. Wiener.
- 1952 - Bedroom furniture designed by William B. Wiener.
- 1952 - Bedroom/bathroom remodeling designed by William B. Wiener.
- 1953 - Driveway is redesigned by William B. Wiener.
- 1957 - Breakfast room remodeling designed by William B. Wiener.
- 1967 - HVAC modified.
- 1974 - Ed Wile's beloved wife, Jessamine (Jeppy), dies from Leukemia
- 1978 - Ed Wile dies and the house is sold to Charles and Maburl Schober
- 2009 - Maburl Schober sells the house to Craig Nicholson (the present owner) and relocates to Pittsburgh, PA.

Disclaimer:

This project has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior through the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism, Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation. However, the contents and opinions incorporated into this

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Sources: "House of I. E. Wile in Shreveport, Louisiana," *The Architectural Record* 76 (Oct. 1934): 252-253.

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Hussey, Mimi. Telephone interview, October 2012.
(Mimi Hussey is Ed Wile's youngest daughter)

Maibech, Seisel. Telephone interview. October 2012.
(Seisel Maibech is Ed Wile's oldest daughter)

Maburl Schober. Telephone interview. October 2012.
(Maburl Schober is the second owner of the Wile house)

Nicholson, Craig. Telephone interview. October 2012.
(Craig Nicholson is the present owner of the Wile house)