



RICK SNYDER  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
MICHIGAN STATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

SCOTT WOOSLEY  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

July 31, 2013

Ms. Jill Thatcher  
Preservation Planner  
City of Ann Arbor, Building Department  
100 N. Fifth Ave.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Dear Ms. Thatcher:

Attached are National Register of Historic Places nomination forms for the William and Elizabeth (Boanzky) Muschenheim House and the Robert C. and Bettie (Sponseller) Metcalf House. In accordance with our Certification Agreement with the city, we request the city's review of these nomination at the earliest available meeting of the city's Historic District Commission. To provide a record of the city's review of the nominations, please complete and return to us the enclosed "Certified Local Government National Register Nomination Report" forms.

Please contact Robert Christensen, national register coordinator, by phone at 517/335-2719 or by email at [christensenr@michigan.gov](mailto:christensenr@michigan.gov) if you have questions.

Sincerely yours,

Brian D. Conway  
State Historic Preservation Officer

Enclosure  
BDC:roc

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

## 1. Name of Property

historic name Metcalf, Robert C. and Bettie J. (Sponseller), House

other names/site number n/a

## 2. Location

street & number 1052 Arlington Boulevard

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

not for publication

city or town Ann Arbor

vicinity

state Michigan code MI county Washtenaw code 161 zip code 48170

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national   X   statewide   \_\_\_   local

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

MI SHPO  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

\_\_\_ entered in the National Register \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

Metcalf, Robert C. and Bettie (Sponseller),  
 House  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of Property

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 \_\_\_\_\_  
 County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
 (Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
 (Check only **one** box.)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

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

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

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

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Single dwelling  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Single dwelling  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: \_\_\_\_\_  
 walls: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 roof: \_\_\_\_\_  
 other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### Summary Paragraph

The Robert and Bettie Metcalf House is a one-story, flat-roof, International Style structure with a rectilinear open plan. Constructed between 1952 and 1954, with additions in 1972 and 1987, it is a unique example of Modern residential architecture designed by local Midland architect Robert Metcalf and built by him and wife Bettie. Horizontality characterizes the house, which in elevation appears to have three main forms. The roof plane on the main rectilinear form is elevated above the other two forms including a garage and living space. Clerestory ribbon windows in the main house form separate the wall plane from the roof creating the effect of a floating roof. The curtain wall openings are perceived as continuations of the wall surfaces and are oriented on each facade to provide views of the surrounding property and capture natural light.

The interior of the house contains approximately 2,200 square feet of space on one level. The open plan and large glazed curtain walls provide natural light and allow expansive views of the surrounding landscape. There are multiple ceiling planes which help to further define the open space. Metcalf included built-in storage units integral to the design. The house is furnished with many original mid-century modern pieces used by the family. The original Chicago common brick floors remain intact.

The house is located along Arlington Boulevard on a .54-acre rectilinear suburban lot southeast of downtown Ann Arbor in close proximity to the Huron Hills Golf Course. Vegetation shields the house, which is set back from Arlington Boulevard. The property is surrounded by other mid-century modern suburban homes.

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### Narrative Description

#### Setting

The Metcalf House is located at 1052 Arlington Boulevard, a two-lane, curvilinear street in the Angell District that begins at Geddes Avenue and terminates south of the Metcalf house at Washtenaw Avenue or Interstate 94B. Interstate 94 was completed with funds under the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 after the Metcalfs constructed their house. To the east of the residence is the Huron Hills Golf Course, which is an eighteen-hole public golf course that opened in 1922. Tom Bendelow (1868-1936), Scottish-American golf course architect, designed Huron Hills Golf Course as well as dozens of golf courses throughout the United States.

Houses in the Angell District were developed from north to south during about a fifty-year time period. The area just north of Geddes Avenue and east of Nichols Arboretum consists of large older houses built during the 1920s and 1930s. The Ann Arbor Hills Neighborhood south of Geddes Avenue, where the Metcalf House is located, consists largely of custom-built mid-century modern homes. However, the flat roofs of the Metcalf House contrast with the surrounding pitched roofs. The Metcalf property rests in the Larkmoor Subdivision among several lots forming an island where several roads meet including Arlington Boulevard, Heather Way, and Aberdeen Drive. Initially, the area south of Geddes Avenue was heavily wooded with dirt roads. Some roads have been paved with curbing and additional houses have been built since the construction of the Metcalf house in 1952.

The Metcalf House is set back approximately 75' from Arlington Road on a 0.54 acre wooded lot. Metcalf acquired the lot adjacent to the lot where the house sits. Together the lots are a little over an acre, roughly square in plan and slope gently downward towards the north. The house is located along the southwestern edge of the 1052 parcel. The siting of the residence within the clearing towards the rear of the property gives the house a feeling of privacy and seclusion. The house is accessed by a brick paved drive that extends southwest from Arlington Boulevard. A portion of the drive extends in front of the house and widens to create a small automobile court while the remainder of the drive continues around the northeast side of the house to the garage. A brick wall approximately 3' tall, double wythe, constructed in a running bond, is located parallel to the northwest facade and separates the driveway from the garden area at the entry. Metcalf planned a garden southeast of the house that included curbing and planters in 1952. In 1972, Metcalf added a patio area at the

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southeast corner and a stone wall parallel to the southwest facade. Again when he expanded the house in 1987 he planned a rock garden area with Japanese influence at the southeast corner of the house towards the rear. A portion of the patio area was enclosed like a courtyard using a wall and new addition. Materials used on the patio area include large geometrically oriented flagstone pavers, gravel, stones and wood blocks used as curbing for planters. The 1972 stone wall addition was replaced and expanded to provide a formal area for growing vegetation bounded by retaining walls and steps. Metcalf later added a fenced-in garden and storage shed towards the rear of the property. The wall screens views of the garage from the front of the house and incorporates a linear storage shed at its western terminus. There are no other buildings on the property.

### Exterior

The Metcalf House is a wood, steel and concrete supported structure clad in glass curtain walls and vertical cedar wood siding. Its form stems from the International Style, which is characterized by an absence of ornament with an emphasis on the volume of forms. The roof consists of built-up roofing resting on a ½" Plyscord (plywood) deck on 2x8 joists with aluminum foil insulation. The house's exterior shell is constructed of 1x4, dark western red cedar siding oriented vertically on the façade. The siding is placed flush with the soffit and a few inches above grade exposing the concrete foundation. Also, a vertical running bond brick chimney intersects the house at the eastern end of the northeast façade. The flat roof-line contains indentations in the fascia for water runoff. The Chicago brick floors site on a 1" setting bed on a 3-1/2" concrete floor. The rectilinear structure, which is 2,200 square feet, rests on 8" cinder block walls and reinforced concrete footings.

### Northeast Elevation

The house is oriented so that the entry faces the road northeast of the house. The alternating roof heights form three masses for the 1952 portion of the northeast elevation including the roof above the entry and the garage at one elevation and the roof above the living area at a higher elevation. The dark cedar wood contrasts with the white roof planes. The northeast elevation consisted of few openings in 1952 including the floor-to-ceiling sidelight adjacent to the flush front door and the clerestory window at the top of the façade that spanned the full length of the living room. The roof extends beyond the front door for protection from the elements and is supported with steel columns. Later additions include some picture windows on the northeast façade. However, the new detached garage placed in front of the house hides much of the new additions.

### Southeast Elevation

The southeast elevation consists of several forms which protrude from the original 1952 exterior wall plane. The large curtain wall that connects the living and dining room to the exterior and the clerestory ribbon windows above connected to the elevated living room roof are the only visible exterior portion of the 1952 elevation. The picture window flanked by louvers connected to the den space was added in 1972. The picture window, flanked by a louver on the right and screened door on the left, which connected to the new bedroom at the southeast corner was added in 1987. A passageway added in that connects the main house to Metcalf's office has a full-height glass wall increasing lighting at the entry. Metcalf's office with day lighting features including the ribbon windows at the top of the facade and pyramid skylight were later additions along with the garage on the northeast end of the façade. A small breezeway exists between the office and garage addition for protection from the elements.

### Southwest Elevation

The original 1952 detached garage is still visible on the western side of the southwest elevation. Metcalf added a decorative downspout as a design feature on the garage. The garage is connected to the house through a small breezeway. The 1972 den addition is visible on the southern end of the elevation. The brick chimney, which rises some feet above the roof plane, intersects the flush vertical siding as well as door on the west side. The 1987 addition rests between the 1952 garage and 1972 den addition. The original building form on the 1987 addition was retained in the protruding roofline on the western end. There are two tall narrow windows asymmetrically placed on either side of a louvered area in contrast to the vertical siding. A decorative animal head is used as a downspout, similar to gargoyles, on this elevation.

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### Northwest Elevation

Besides the rectangular window for the original bedroom and clerestory windows for the living room, the 1952 portion of the northwest façade is relatively unadorned with openings. A tall, flush door and large sidelight that connect the utility room and garage are the only other openings on the façade. Metcalf economically used a board and batten exterior shell on the garage as opposed to the vertical cedar siding used on the other portions of the house. The addition of Metcalf's office included a short, horizontal bay of windows at the top of the façade. The garage has a single overhead door.

### Interior

The interior of the house contains approximately 2,200 square feet on one floor including two bedrooms. The home's open plan has few dividing walls in the main living areas. The interior spaces are loosely defined by a combination of partitions and built-in storage and furnishings. The public living spaces to the northeast and private living spaces to the southwest are separated by solid walls. Metcalf enhanced the design's connection to the exterior through the use of natural light, the natural cedar wood material used and the various plants he included on the house interior. The front entrance opens into the main living space and dining area with light that floods into the space from the southeast curtain wall. A rigid partition distinguishes the living space from the entry. Two small steel columns support the lower roof adjacent to the curtain wall. The ceiling of the lower roof has cedar wood with rectangular light fixtures in contrast with the white ceiling and hanging sphere light fixtures in the living room and kitchen space. Metcalf commented on the brick floors in an interview, "We used Chicago common brick because it was cheap." Metcalf's selection of brick was not only an inexpensive alternative at the time, but it was also an energy-efficient option which absorbs heat during daylight from the large curtain wall. Metcalf retained many of the furnishings he used to decorate the house in 1952. Signature pieces include the white Formica-topped coffee table Metcalf designed, the orange Herman Miller sofa, the George Nakashima walnut table and chairs in the dining area and the Harry Bertoia diamond chairs used throughout the house. The piano is also a signature piece Metcalf included in the furniture layout. A large cabinet consisting of Formica sliding doors divides the living room and kitchen spaces.

The kitchen also retains the original layout and contains original materials Metcalf specified. The layout is practical with the stove, counters, and cabinets along the southwest wall parallel to the sink counters, cabinets and refrigerator. Similar sliding doors in the living room cabinet are used for the kitchen cabinets. Stainless steel countertops cover the counters, which Metcalf specified for their ease of maintenance. In the construction documents, Metcalf specified the uses for each of the custom designed Masonite cabinets as storage units for a garbage dispenser, vegetable drawer, bread drawer, dining table storage, flour bin, sugar bin, spice rack, etc. William H. Masonite invented Masonite as a building material in 1924 by converting wood chips into a high-density fiberboard. The utility room containing the laundry area and storage on the southeast wall and entry from the garage on the northwest wall is located southwest of the kitchen area. The utility room wall to the southeast is conveniently connected to the heating or mechanical room and the bathroom, which take advantage of the plumbing wall. Space for laundry with storage space above is provided in the utility room, which has an exterior door on the opposite wall. A sliding door encloses the mechanical room, which includes a boiler for heating pipes which run below the floor throughout the house. The bathroom features a backlit corrugated Plexiglass coffered ceiling with a rectangular skylight opening above, white square tile walls and floor, a Formica counter top, a built in mirrored medicine cabinet above and a Masonite sliding door storage cabinet below the sink. Daniel J. O'Connor and Herbert A. Faber invented Formica in 1912 made from a plastic laminate and resin.

The original study designed in 1952 contained a curtain wall on the southeast wall; a desk, built-in cabinets with closet on the southwest wall; and a sofa and side table on the north east wall. This study was revised to include a bookshelf on the northeast wall and a conference table creating a library space. The closet area on the northeast wall was expanded to include two closets with sliding doors. The library/study has a backlit corrugated glass and wood coffered ceiling. Also, Metcalf demolished the curtain wall on the southeast wall in 1972 to create a den. The den has vertical cedar siding on the northeast and southwest walls. The den contains a door to the rear patio area, a fireplace with a large hood integral to the wall, and a closet on the southwest wall. A large picture window flanked by a built-in storage cabinet above and a sliding door storage cabinet below the window allows light into the space on the southeast wall. There is storage space along the full length of the northeast wall with an exit door at the north end. The southwest wall has a fireplace in the center with a large rectangular hood as tall as the ceiling.

The original 1952 bedroom is located at the southwest end towards the rear of the house for privacy. The bedroom has similar cedar wood paneling with a Chicago common brick floor and ceiling with recessed can lights. There is a full-width sliding wood partition on the southeast wall separating a bedroom from the adjacent study. On the northwest wall sliding

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doors enclose a walk-in closet and a built-in sliding-door cabinet rests in a niche at the window. HVAC is provided through a soffit clad in a wood finish.

In 1985, Metcalfe added a workspace southeast of the original bedroom. The workspace was separated with a sliding wood partition and is furnished with a built-in wall shelf and desk on the northeast wall and a desk in the center of the room supported by legs enclosing a file cabinet on one side and a window seat on the opposite side. There is a large picture window on the southeast wall flanked by a small wall cabinet flush with the wall. The ceiling, at a lower height than the ceiling of the adjacent space, is finished in horizontally spaced wood panels. Four flat rectangular light fixtures and a rectangular mechanical diffuser supply light and ventilation to the space.

Metcalfe also added a master bedroom suite on the southwest façade in 1985. The bedroom ceiling plane extends to the exterior of the house providing shade and a sense of openness to the outdoors. Metcalfe used the same cedar wood vertical panels in the main bedroom enhancing the connection of the exterior to the interior of the house. A built-in window seat on the northwest wall has a white sill that reflects light into the bedroom. The ceiling consists of ceiling tiles directly applied to the structure. Mechanical vents supply air into the bedroom through a lowered ceiling at the entry. A double-door closet on the northwest wall has wood sliding doors. The hallway northwest of the bedroom connects to the master bathroom and large walk-in closet. The walk-in closet contains a domed square-shaped skylight and a tall narrow exterior window that light the space. A mechanical space is located adjacent to the walk-in closet at the northwest corner of the house. The bathroom has a corrugated glass coffered ceiling with a dual function as a ceiling and lights. A domed square-shaped skylight lights the space as well. The bathroom is finished in wood with a small white square tile floor and shower surround. The large shower was designed for easy accessibility.

Metcalfe also added a passageway at the entry in place of a closet that connects to his office and garage. The walls in this addition are gypsum board painted white with wood trim at corners and at the molding unlike the vertical cedar throughout the rest of the house. A closet with sliding door panels flanks the hallway's northeast wall. A flush wood door leads to additional storage space. A rectangular window is placed at the corner of the northwest wall. The low ceiling rises several inches in the newer addition. There are white square tiles similar to the ones used in the bathrooms on the floor. Metcalfe's office is flooded with light from the large pyramid skylight and the bands of horizontal windows at the top of the walls. White ceiling tiles are applied directly to the ceiling. Oval-shaped light fixtures light up the skylight area when dark. There are white rectangular tiles on the floor. Metcalfe's office is furnished with a drafting table and several cabinets along the walls.

### **Alterations**

Alterations to the house are discussed in the narratives above but primarily include the incorporation of the den and patio on the southeast facade in 1972, the addition of the master bedroom suite and rear landscaping on the southwest façade in 1987, and the later construction of the garage and Metcalfe's office. All of these modifications were designed by Robert Metcalfe and built under his direction.

### **Outbuildings**

There is a concrete block storage shed used as an outbuilding at the rear of property towards the west. An off-center single panel door and fascia covering the flat roof are the only adornments.

### **Integrity**

Although the house has experienced some changes to its original form and plan, the very changes and additions that were made over time were executed by the original owner and architect and do not diminish the overall understanding of the architecture. Metcalfe designed the additions using similar materials and forms and thus the property retains the unique modern character.

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**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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1952  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1952  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Robert C. Metcalf  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Robert C. Metcalf – Architect  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance (justification)**

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**



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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Robert C. and Bettie (Sponseller) Metcalf House is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria B and C at the state level of significance as a notable example of the Modern Movement and for its association with architect and Dean Emeritus of the University of Michigan College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Robert C. Metcalf. The Metcalf House was designed by University of Michigan (UM)-trained architect Robert C. Metcalf for himself and his family in the first years of his career, while working for UM professor George B. Brigham. Built in 1952-53, largely by Metcalf and his wife Bettie, the Metcalf House possesses significance in the category of Architecture as an innovative residential design exhibiting the fundamental characteristics of the Modern Movement including its simple geometric form, use of large expanses of glass to bring nature and sunlight into the interior, and its open floor plan. After graduating from the UM in 1950, Metcalf remained in Ann Arbor and began to teach at the UM while at the same time establishing a private architectural practice. At the university he was named Chairman of the Department of Architecture in 1968, and then served as the first Dean of the College of Architecture, first appointed in 1974. He retired from the university in 1991. During the course of his private career, Metcalf designed over 150 projects in Michigan and Ohio, many for UM faculty and staff. Metcalf received numerous awards for his work, and his buildings have appeared in many popular publications. He was named to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects in 1972.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

## Biography

### *Childhood*

Robert Clarence Metcalf was born in Nashville, Ohio, on November 7, 1923. His biological father, George Metcalf, left the family before Metcalf's first birthday. His mother, Helen (Drake), moved to nearby Canton, where she worked as a maid and eventually remarried<sup>1</sup> to Arthur G. Hudkins.

As the Great Depression took its toll, his step-father lost his job with the Canton Car Company, and, shortly thereafter, the family was forced by necessity to move to North Industry, a short distance south of Canton, where housing was more affordable. Shortly after moving, his mother's brother visited the family. When he noticed young Metcalf sitting on the floor, drawing on some paper, he said to him, "Boy, you ought to be an architect." Seven-year-old Metcalf, not knowing what an architect was, consulted his dictionary and "found out that they designed buildings." Upon reading the definition, he thought, "Gee whiz, I'd like to design homes," and there set his mind then to becoming an architect.<sup>2</sup>

### *College and World War II*

While attending the North Industry School, Metcalf frequently spoke out in favor of allowing teenagers to dance, an activity which some people, at that time, considered a societal ill, but something he believed was merely a healthy form of exercise. At one venue, an architect from Canton asked Metcalf where he intended to go to college. Metcalf recalled that when he replied that he was unsure, the architect suggested that he "go to (the University of) Michigan." "Don't go to Ohio State," he continued, "it's a lousy school. Michigan is a great school for architecture."<sup>3</sup>

So, after graduating from high school in 1940, he applied to the University of Michigan Department of Architecture, was accepted, and began his coursework in the fall of 1941. His studies, however, were interrupted by the Second World War. Initially rejected for service because of flat feet and a punctured ear drum, he was eventually inducted into the army in March 1943. He was trained at North Camp Polk and Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, and was later selected to study civil engineering at Johns Hopkins University. He was later transferred to the 333rd infantry regiment, 84th Infantry Division,

<sup>1</sup> Grace Shackman, "Metcalf Modern," *Ann Arbor Observer*, April 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Robert C. Metcalf, interview with Eric Hill, November 11, 2011, transcript, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 2.

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before leaving for Europe in September 1944. The division entered combat on November 18, 1944, by attacking German forces in the town of Geilenkirchen. The division engaged in operations throughout the Roer Valley, and assisted in repelling German forces during the Battle of the Bulge. In February 1945 Metcalf was promoted to Staff Sergeant,<sup>4</sup> and in May he was graduated from officer candidate school in France having been commissioned a Second Lieutenant.<sup>5</sup> Throughout 1945 the division engaged in numerous fights as it pushed eastward toward the Elbe River. After V-E Day, the 84th remained in Germany on occupation duty until December 1945.

The division was demobilized upon its return to the United States in January 1946.<sup>6</sup> In addition to his promotion and officer's commission, Metcalf also awarded the Silver Star, given for conspicuous gallantry in action, in 1945,<sup>7</sup> and three battle stars.<sup>8</sup>

Upon returning to Ann Arbor, Metcalf resumed his studies, and, in addition to his course work, spent the next four years working for his mentor, UM professor George B. Brigham. Brigham came to the UM from the California Institute of Technology, in 1930, when he accepted a teaching position at the university.<sup>9</sup> Trained in classical architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Brigham reevaluated his ideas during the late 1920s and early 1930s. After arriving in Ann Arbor, Brigham's architecture took on a decidedly modern bent by combining modern materials with new construction techniques. He is credited with what may be called Ann Arbor's first modern house in 1936.<sup>10</sup> The balance of Brigham's career was devoted in large part to innovation, both in academia and in private practice, maintaining a particular focus on prefabrication and architectural research.

Prior to his induction into the Army, Metcalf became familiar with Brigham both as a professor and through dinners and other meetings Brigham's wife, Ilma, arranged at the Brigham's house. These interactions must have left an impression upon Metcalf, for upon returning to the university after his discharge in 1946, Metcalf went to Brigham's house to inquire about working for him.

By the mid-1940s, Brigham's modern designs had attracted numerous commissions that lay uncompleted, so he hired Metcalf to work with him as a draftsman. Between 1946 and 1950 Metcalf contributed to some thirty, mostly residential, projects.<sup>11</sup>

### **Early Career**

The year 1950 marked a significant point in Metcalf's career. He was graduated from the UM, he was eligible to receive an architectural license, he left Brigham's practice to establish his own, and he began designing his own house. He wrote in 1991 that Ann Arbor in the 1950s "seemed the best place to begin a practice based on contemporary house design," and hoped that the construction of his house would attract clients.<sup>12</sup> Metcalf also observed that Brigham had "paved the way," as it were, with his functional residential designs, and that the liberal-minded UM faculty would be a likely source of clients. Also in his favor, he thought, was the "more forward-looking" Ann Arbor Federal Savings Bank, which provided financing that other banks would not.<sup>13</sup>

In order to attract clients, and to provide a place for him and his wife to live, Metcalf decided to design and build his own house. With some assistance, the Metcalfs began construction of their house in 1952 and moved in in 1953. Shortly

<sup>4</sup> "Serving Our Country's Flag: News of District Men in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps," *Canton Repository*, February 13, 1945.

<sup>5</sup> "Serving Our Country's Flag: News of District Men in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps," *Canton Repository*, September 2, 1945.

<sup>6</sup> 84th Infantry Division Combat Chronicle. *The Army Almanac: A Book of Facts Concerning the Army of the United States*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950, 556-557. <http://www.history.army.mil/html/forcestruc/cbtchron/cc/084id.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Department of War General Order No. 38 of 1945.

<sup>8</sup> "Serving Our Country's Flag: News of District Men in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps," *Canton Repository*, September 2, 1945.

<sup>9</sup> "Prof. George B. Brigham," *Ann Arbor News*, June 2, 1959.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Sies, "George B. Brigham Papers, 1925-1967," *Bentley Historical Library*, 1982, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/bhlead/umich-bhl-9634?byte=36077401;cginame=findaid-idx;focusrgn=bioghist;id=navbarbrowselink;subview=standard;view=reslist>.

<sup>11</sup> Robert C. Metcalf, "Metcalf Remembers," *Portico*, Summer 1991, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Robert C. Metcalf, "Metcalf Remembers," *Portico*, Summer 1991, 15.

<sup>13</sup> "The Owner-Built House," *Ann Arbor Observer*, June 1977.

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thereafter, his first client, UM physics professor Richard Crane and his wife, Florence, who wanted a house in which they could be separated from the noise and clutter of their teenage children,<sup>14</sup> came to call.

Over the next few months four more clients came to the Metcalfs' house.<sup>15</sup> The additional work necessitated hiring staff to assist with various facets of the design process. Tivadar Balogh and William Werner, both UM graduates, were hired to assist Metcalf with the architectural work. Balogh created drawings to give clients an idea of what their house would look like, and Werner produced working drawings. This small operation initially convened at the Metcalfs' home, then moved to the one-car garage, and in 1965 to the first floor of an office building at 444 South Main Street,<sup>16</sup> and ultimately to an office in 1967, designed by Metcalf, on Medford Road. Bettie Metcalf eventually left her nursing position with the University of Michigan Health Service to manage the administrative affairs of the office.<sup>17</sup>

Metcalf joined the UM Department of Architecture faculty as a visiting lecturer in 1955. He was promoted to assistant professor in 1957, associate professor in 1963, and professor and chairman of the department of architecture in 1968. Early in his academic career he was instrumental in reintegrating design courses into the curriculum, which the department had previously removed. Metcalf is also credited with developing new courses in materials and methods of construction.<sup>18</sup>

Professionally, Metcalf was elected president of the Huron Valley Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1967,<sup>19</sup> and, in 1972, was elected to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architects.<sup>20</sup>

### **Mid Career**

Metcalf became the first dean of the new College of Architecture and Urban Planning in 1974 when it was split off from the School of Design. He initiated the first doctoral program in architecture, made the school a center for research and doubled its enrollment. He has held offices with the AIA of Michigan, and was given their President's Award for his commitment to training young architects.<sup>21</sup> That same year, he was awarded the Sol King Award for Excellent Teaching in America. Metcalf was awarded the prize for the department's high quality of education, and his "support of new programs, the effective administration of budgets, the counseling of students, [and] the concern for faculty effectiveness." It was noted that he was "truly a total educator who is profoundly effective and excellent in all endeavors."<sup>22</sup>

Again in 1974 Metcalf was named dean of the reorganized College of Architecture and Urban Planning. The newly formed department was formed as a distinct unit from the previous College of Architecture and Design. The Design section of the former department was reorganized as the College of Art.<sup>23</sup>

### **Late Career**

By the early 1990s, Metcalf's private practice had completed some eighty houses in the Ann Arbor area, and nearly 120 projects in total. As a professor, he instructed over 2,500 students from 1950, when he began teaching, until 1986, when he resigned as dean and began the process of retiring from academia.<sup>24</sup> He fully retired from teaching in 1991, which allowed him to devote more time and energy to his professional practice.

<sup>14</sup> Grace Shackman, "Metcalf Modern," *Ann Arbor Observer*, April 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Robert C. Metcalf, "Metcalf Remembers," *Portico*, Summer 1991, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Grace Shackman, "Metcalf Modern," *Ann Arbor Observer*, April 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Robert C. Metcalf, "Metcalf Remembers," *Portico*, Summer 1991, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> "Two U-M Department Heads OKd," *Ann Arbor News*, May 18, 1968.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> "Architect Honored," *Ann Arbor News*, May 29, 1972.

<sup>21</sup> "2008 Historic Preservation Awards," *City of Ann Arbor*, May 5, 2008,

<http://www.a2gov.org/government/communityservices/planninganddevelopment/historicpreservation/Documents/2008%20Award%20s.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> "Architect Metcalf Honored," *Ann Arbor News*, April 18, 1974.

<sup>23</sup> "New Deans Will Head Architecture and Art," *Ann Arbor News*, July 1, 1974, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Robert C. Metcalf, "Metcalf Remembers," *Portico*, Summer 1991, 15.

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### **Awards and Recognition**

Robert Metcalf received several professional and academic awards throughout his career. In 1955 he received a Design Awards Citation from *Progressive Architecture* and an Award of Merit for the design of his house from the Detroit Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. The *Progressive Architecture* award is especially noteworthy since Metcalf was one of thirty-four winners from five hundred submissions. The design he submitted with Tivadar Balogh for a youth center earned Honorable Mention in the 1956 Porcelain Enamel Design Competition sponsored by *Architectural Forum* magazine and the Ferro Corporation. His scheme for the Patterson House won Honorable Mention in the small homes (under 1,600 square feet) category of the 1958 *Homes for Better Living* competition sponsored by the American Institute of Architects and *Life and House and Home* magazines. Also in 1958 his design for the Church of the Good Shepherd in Ann Arbor received the Third Award from the Church Architecture Guild of America, and his plan for the Patterson House, Ann Arbor, received a Merit Award for the Homes for Better Living competition. The college bestowed the Sol King Award for Excellence in Teaching upon him in 1974, and in 1999 the Michigan Chapter of the American Institute of Architects recognized Metcalf with the President's Award for "his lifetime of dedication to training young architects."<sup>25</sup> In 2008, Metcalf was presented with a Preservation Award from the City of Ann Arbor for his commitment to preserving the integrity of his home, as well as his commitment to the university and its students.

### **Robert C. and Bettie (Sponseller) Metcalf House**

Completed in 1952-53, the Metcalf House exhibits the fundamental characteristics of the Modern Movement through Metcalf's implementation of the Modernist principles of structural clarity, truth in materials, and simplified forms. Metcalf's meticulous attention to detail and the careful planning and arrangement of spaces impart a sense of elegance and serenity throughout the house.

When searching the Ann Arbor area for a place to build their home in 1950, Bettie Metcalf found a large lot just outside the city's eastern limits. (The subdivision was laid out in 1927, but very few houses were built during the Depression and World War II.) Robert Metcalf spent approximately one year designing the house, and construction began on May 22, 1952, when Robert and an assistant lined out the garage. The next day, construction began in earnest when the footings for the garage were dug. In June portions of the house were laid out, footings were dug, and corner blocks were laid.<sup>26</sup> Little by little each day the Metcalfs and their assistants made progress, and, by the autumn of 1953, the Metcalfs were able to move into their home.<sup>27</sup>

During the course of construction, Metcalf kept an incredibly detailed journal of each days' work, noting the work done, the number of hours each task required, who assisted that day, what supplies were needed or delivered, and, occasionally, what lessons could be learned and what other observations could be made of the day. Finding this process immensely rewarding, Metcalf characterized the house as a "learning laboratory of great value," and urged "any fledgling architect to design and build his or her own house." It is, he continued, "a guaranteed and rapid way to fix in your mind the complex nature of design, detail, and construction," noting, "you learn very fast" if the design for the building was inadequate.<sup>28</sup>

In the construction of his house, Metcalf employed a number of techniques and materials that would later become trademarks, or serve as templates in future designs. Wood is used extensively as wall treatments and decorative details and in custom furnishings.<sup>29</sup> Modernist furnishings by Eames, Saarinen, Bertoia, and others were used to furnish the home. The floors are constructed of beehive-kilned brick. Radiant heating is achieved through the use of 1,100 feet of one-and-a-quarter inch wrought iron pipe placed under the brick, and seventeen inches on center.<sup>30</sup> Floor-to-ceiling glass windows across the rear façade are angled to a southeastern orientation, allowing for less sun in the summer, but more heat gain in the winter.<sup>31</sup> The use of louvered ventilation doors allow the house to remain cool in the summer while

<sup>25</sup> "Architect's Honor Dean Metcalf."

<sup>26</sup> Robert C. Metcalf, "Book 1 of the Construction of Our Home."

<sup>27</sup> Grace Shackman, "Metcalf Modern," *Ann Arbor Observer*, April 2011.

<sup>28</sup> "An Interview with Robert Metcalf." *Dimensions*, 1991, 39.

<sup>29</sup> Ann Schriber, "Well-known local architect's designs earn him admiration." *Ann Arbor News*. May 30, 1998.

<sup>30</sup> Robert C. Metcalf, interview with Eric Hill, November 11, 2011, transcript.

<sup>31</sup> Grace Shackman, "Metcalf Modern." *Ann Arbor Observer*, Apr. 2011.

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ensuring privacy.<sup>32</sup> Rainwater drained into the backyard through an interior pipe, in effect creating a rain garden long before they became popular.<sup>33</sup>

When initially constructed, Metcalf's house occupied 1,080 square feet, but was designed to accommodate future expansions. Over time, three additions have been made to the house. The first added 400 square feet, the second 800, and the last 250 square feet. The final addition included the pyramidal glass roof near the garage. In 2010, Metcalf, concerned about the possibility of future owners defacing the house with an unsympathetic addition, constructed a two-car garage, noting, "I figure they would wreck the house by putting the garage right out in front," he explained.<sup>34</sup>

Writing in 1956, Nathan T. Whitman observed that the Metcalf House:

Combines geometric surfaces and fine open vistas with the warmth of wood and tile and the texture of varied materials. It creates a living area that avoids the antiseptic quality but retains the formal beauty of the modern idiom.<sup>35</sup>

The Metcalf House has not only served as the template for his oeuvre,<sup>36</sup> but can be considered a self-portrait, embodying Metcalf's thoughts and beliefs about architecture and design and the way man relates to his environment, both built and natural.

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**Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

"84th Infantry Division Combat Chronicle." *World War II Divisional Combat Chronicles*. Accessed May 2013, <http://www.history.army.mil/html/forestruc/cbtchron/cc/084id.htm>.

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Shackman, Grace. "Metcalf Modern." *Ann Arbor Observer*, April 2011.

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<sup>32</sup> Ann Schriber, "Well-known local architect's designs earn him admiration." *Ann Arbor News*. May 30, 1998.

<sup>33</sup> Grace Shackman, "Metcalf Modern." *Ann Arbor Observer*, Apr. 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Nathan T. Whitman, unidentified article, Robert C. Metcalf Papers, 1950-2008, Bentley Historical Library.

<sup>36</sup> Robert C. Metcalf, interview with Eric Hill, November 11, 2011, transcript.

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"The Owner-Built House." *Ann Arbor Observer*, June 1977.

"Two U-M Department Heads OKd." *Ann Arbor News* (Ann Arbor, MI), May 18, 1968.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** .58 acres  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>17</u>	<u>276616</u>	<u>4683200</u>	3	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	4	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Robert Yallop / Todd Walsh, Historic Preservation Analyst  
organization Lord-Aeck-Sargent Architects / MISHPO date May 2013  
street & number 213 S. Ashley St., Suite 200 / 702 W Kalamazoo St, (877) 929-1400 / (517) 373-1630  
PO Box 30740 telephone             
city or town Ann Arbor/Lansing zip code 48104 /  
           State MI 48909  
e-mail walsh@michigan.gov

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Metcalf, Robert C. and Bettie (Sponseller), House

City or Vicinity: Ann, Arbor

County: Washtenaw

State: MI

Photographer: Rob Yallop, Lord, Aeck & Sargent Architecture

Date Photographed:

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 1 of 14 View of front elevation from Arlington Boulevard.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0001
- 2 of 14 Front elevation of original portion of house.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0002
- 3 of 14 View of main entrance and garden wall looking southeast toward office and garage addition.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0003
- 4 of 14 View of rear elevation.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0004
- 5 of 14 View of rear and side elevation looking north.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0005
- 6 of 14 View of side elevation including 197X addition.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0006
- 7 of 14 View of 198X addition looking north.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0007
- 8 of 14 View of house looking southwest.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0008
- 9 of 14 View of living room from front entrance.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0009
- 10 of 14 View from living room looking towards kitchen.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0010
- 11 of 14 View of kitchen.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0011
- 12 of 14 View of Dining Room looking west from 19XX addition.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0012
- 13 of 14 View from Dining Room looking east towards 19XX addition.  
MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0013
- 14 of 14 View of Master Bedroom looking south.



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MI\_WashtenawCounty\_MetcalfHouse\_0014

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**Property Owner:**

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

name \_\_\_\_\_

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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.