

State and National Register of Historic Places Nomination
Individual Building Nomination
March 2011

THE ROBERT T. COLES HOUSE AND STUDIO

321 Humboldt Parkway
Buffalo, Erie County, New York 14208-1023



Prepared by:



Clinton Brown Company Architecture ReBuild
The Pierce Building in the Theatre Historic District
653 Main Street, Suite 104
Buffalo, New York 14203
PH (716) 852-2020 FX (716) 852-3132
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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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If 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 from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name ROBERT T. COLES HOUSE AND STUDIO

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 321 Humboldt Parkway [] not for publication

city or town Buffalo [] vicinity

state New York code NY county Erie code 029 zip code 14208-1023

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [] nationally [] statewide locally. ([] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation

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 the 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

date of action

ROBERT T. COLES HOUSE AND STUDIO

ERIE, NEW YORK

Name of Property

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 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 that 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 boxes that apply.)

- 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

Areas of Significance:

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance:

1961

Significant Dates:

1961

Significant Person:

N/A

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Robert Traynham Coles, FAIA

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 Building Survey

- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other repository: _____

ROBERT T. COLES HOUSE AND STUDIO
Name of Property

ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 0.18

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 6011 4759683
Zone Easting Northing

3 18
Zone Easting Northing

2 18

4 18

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jennifer Walkowski, Architectural Historian edited by Kathleen LaFrank, NYSHPO

organization _____ date March 2011

street & number 653 Main Street, Suite 104 telephone 716-852-2020

city or town Buffalo state NY zip code 14203

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 SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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

name Robert T Coles

street & number 321 Humboldt Parkway telephone _____

city or town Buffalo state NY zip code 14208

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, D.C. 20503

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

The Robert T. Coles House and Studio is located on the south side of Humboldt Parkway between Loring Avenue and Oakgrove Avenue/Hughes Avenue in the City of Buffalo, Erie County, New York. This community is known as the Hamlin Park neighborhood and was designated a local historic district by the City of Buffalo in 1994. Designed and built by Robert Traynham Coles in 1961, the nominated building is a customized prefabricated house and office space composed of two rectangular units arranged in an L-configuration, with the main circulation core serving as a hyphen. The studio is one-story in height, while the house or dwelling unit rises one and one-half stories above grade. The later is partially recessed into the earth, giving it a "split-level" character. The upper level is cantilevered above the lower visible half-story on its west, east and south facades. The lot is approximately rectangular, with an angled rear property line, measuring approximately 50-feet wide by 174-feet in depth. The building was constructed in a densely-built early twentieth century urban neighborhood. The nomination includes one contributing building.

The property is landscaped with reference to the functions of the two building units; the public front yard is shielded from the busy street by a dense landscape of shrubs and a fence that encloses a sculpture garden and courtyard. The design is thoughtfully planned to integrate the entire site into a comprehensive composition of landscape, building and interior. The private rear court is enclosed by a fence and is more open, landscaped with raised beds for gardens surrounding gravel ground cover near the center of the yard to minimize lawn care. The rear court also contains several large trees, compost bins and a vegetable garden. Designed by Coles, the yard remains largely intact from 1961.

The combined house and studio is an excellent example of mid-twentieth century Modern residential architecture that incorporated some pre-fabricated and pre-cut components into its construction. The two-level house is constructed of wood post-and-beam construction, with non-structural panels of either gypsum drywall on wood stud, a combination panel of drywall on stud and glass, or full-height sliding glass doors inserted as walls. The studio unit is similarly constructed but one-story in height.

The posts and beams are Douglas fir from Canada and measure up to 4-inches x 16-inches in size. The concrete block foundation on concrete slab serves as the walls for the lower floor, eliminating a basement, and there is no attic. The lower level is partially sunken into the earth, which is excavated at the south elevation to create a sunken terrace accessible from the adjacent rooms.

One of the most interesting features in the design of the Coles House and Studio is its orientation and division of public and private spaces. The building is oriented to minimize the noise and pollution in the private dwelling spaces. Originally the Frederick Law Olmsted-designed Humboldt Parkway was located through this area, running two-miles between Agassiz Circle and Humboldt Park. The parkway served as a wide, spacious green lawn with a central bridal path for carriages; it was also used for socializing and recreation. The arrival of the Scajquada Expressway in the 1950s, compounded by the construction of the Kensington Expressway, beginning in 1960, designed to provide quick access to the downtown from the area's growing suburban areas further east, ushered in a new age of high-speed automobile traffic. Most of the traditional houses that dominate the Hamlin Park neighborhood have façades facing the street, typically incorporating a large front porch to augment the connection between the street and the house. In contrast, the Coles House and Studio

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 2

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

reverses this siting. Instead, the studio faces the street and the residence is oriented with its façade facing the quiet, tranquil rear court, where the din from the expressways is hardly heard.

The Coles House and Studio is divided into two rectangular units (refer to diagram). The one-story unit closest to the street, and oriented perpendicularly to it, was the automobile garage and studio space, a public wing. The unit located furthest away from the street, oriented parallel to it, serves as the private living unit and contains spaces used by the Coles family, including bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen space. These two units, public and private, are connected by a central entry hall and circulation core with a stair. The hall serves as a transitional space between the public and private units. In general, those walls that face the more public portions of the site (such as to the north, facing the road, and the east and west, which are in close proximity to the neighbors) are solid with no fenestration. Those walls which are sheltered from the urban environment, which face more private areas of the property, such as the rear court or the sheltered courtyard, are composed of large windows, allowing ample light and fresh air to flood the house.

The one-story studio unit is constructed of wood post-and-beam members and features a flat membrane roof with copper flashing, giving it a geometrical box-like appearance. The beams run in an east-west orientation. The north elevation, which faces the street, is of brick painted white, with a small window set high on the wall. The west elevation of the studio building, which faces into the front courtyard, features modular walls consisting of steel framework painted deep red with non-structural, gold-hued drywall and wood stud panels and large glass windows with transoms. A small recessed entry porch at the hyphen features a simple entry door into the circulation core. The east facing wall is solid with no openings, appropriate given its close proximity to the neighboring property.

Like the studio wing, the house, or dwelling unit, is constructed of wood post-and-beam construction, with the lower half-story consisting of the concrete foundation wall, which is brick-clad. Here, the beams run in a north-south orientation. It also features a similar flat roof with copper flashing. The symmetrical north elevation, which faces into the courtyard/sculpture garden, features a lower half-story of brick-veneered concrete block walls inset with non-structural panels with steel framework and generous glazed windows. Above this is a one-story solid wall sided in vertical cedar planks, left natural and untreated and now aged to a grey patina. The east and west facades, which face the neighboring properties, are non-descript elevations with no windows, maintaining the privacy of the residents within. The south-facing elevation is perhaps the Coles House and Studio's most impressive elevation.

Designed as the building's most dramatic elevation, the south elevation is two levels in height. This south elevation reveals the building's post-and-beam construction and uses the non-structural walls between the members to full advantage, fitting large windows and glass doors in the openings. The lower level of the building, which is recessed into the earth, features a sunken terrace with flagstone pavers. Full-width risers with treads made of timbers (originally railroad ties, which have been replaced) allow the lower level flush access to the rear court. This lower level contains a central brick portion, painted white, flanked by a window with operable sash above a solid panel. At either end of the lower level is a set of sliding glass doors. The upper level is cantilevered over the lower level on its east, west and south elevations. On the south elevation, the upper level wall is recessed, forming a full-width porch with a simple wood and metal railing. The wall of

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 3

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

this upper level is composed of several windows and sliding glass door panels, with minimal opaque panels used only when privacy is required, giving the upper level a greater sense of openness and transparency.

The interior of the Coles House and Studio has remained essentially unchanged since its original construction. The main entrance to the building is through a relatively plain door, which opens into the transitional space of the hyphen. This entry space opens to the north into the architectural studio, and has a stair to the private residential spaces to its south. In a split-level design, one run of stairs accesses the lower level of the house, while another run leads to the upper level of the house unit. The stair features a period balustrade constructed of simple rectangular wood plank handrails supported with simple thin metal balusters, similar in design and appearance to the more substantial balustrade on the south façade recessed porch.

Originally, the studio block contained a space used as an automobile garage, but the studio has now expanded to utilize the entire unit. Visible on the interior of this space are the paneled wall systems, and the ceiling is finished with honey-toned, 2-inch by 6-inch tongue-and-groove Douglas fir plank.

The lower level of the house unit contains a utility room, located beneath the hyphen. This level also includes two bedrooms (one now used as a studio and office for Mrs. Coles, a photographer, and the other as a guest room), a small bathroom, a work room and a combined dining-kitchen space. The dining-kitchen space features an open plan, with the kitchen portion divided from the dining portion by a bank of kitchen cabinets that are open and serve as counter seating in the dining portion. This space features vinyl tile flooring. The walls in the dining-kitchen space also feature the drywall and stud with glass wall systems on the south elevations and a brick wall painted white on the east wall in the dining portion. The cabinetry is a golden-toned wood with little visible grain, with white laminate countertops. While not original to the house, the furnishings in the dining room are of contemporary design; they include an oval Tulip dining table designed by Eero Saarinen in 1956. The low-backed wood and metal stools at the counter are original to the house. Visible from the dining-kitchen space and from the south bedroom (now used as a sitting room) is the full-width exterior terrace, which augments the sense of openness and connection to nature through the large banks of windows on this façade.

The upper level of the house unit features a spacious living room, a small guest bedroom (now an office space), and the master bedroom and bath. The living room features cork tile flooring (original), white-finished walls with the large expanses of glass on the south wall, and the exposed wood beam ceiling with tongue-and-groove Douglas fir planks above. The room features a bank of built-in golden-toned wood cabinetry on the eastern wall and by the half-wall adjacent to the stair (which once served as a bar). Small rectangular skylights add additional light to the room. The living room also features a freestanding dark metal fireplace of a modern design near the west wall. The south wall features a sliding glass door that leads to the recessed porch beyond, again reinforcing the sense of light and openness on this side of the house. Furnishings in the room are primarily from the mid-twentieth century and include two Eames lounge chairs with ottomans (designed by noted furniture designers Charles and Ray Eames and released in 1956) and other simple, modern style furniture.

One of the other key areas on the upper level is the master suite. This space is also minimally decorated and finished, with natural tones of wood with white used. A low, platform type bed is aligned with a view out the

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 4

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

expanse of windows on the south wall, and a modern-style wood cabinet forms a headboard for the bed. An interesting original feature in the master bedroom is the mid-century designed wall-mounted light fixture near the bathroom. It is constructed of two conical metal shades, one pointed up and one pointed down. The master bathroom retains many of its original elements as well, including honey-toned wood cabinetry and a vanity, corner bathtub unit and ample walk-in closet.

Overall, the Robert T. Coles House and Studio is an excellent example of Modern Movement architectural design. The entire property works to integrate a carefully planned and designed landscape, building and interior design into one comprehensive design. Because it has been preserved and maintained for fifty years by its original owner and designer, the entire site reflects Coles's original goals and vision for his private residence and work space. The house and studio maintain their unique separation of public and private space, as originally envisioned by Coles as both architect and resident. It retains a high level of integrity of original materials, and its finishes, furnishings and accessories complement the overall feel of the house as a mid-twentieth century architectural design.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 1

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

The Robert T. Coles House and Studio is significant under Criterion C as an outstanding and highly intact example of mid-twentieth century Modern residential architecture in Buffalo. Designed and constructed in 1961 by its owner, a prominent local architect, the building used pre-fabricated and pre-cut components in its construction that were drawn from Coles's experience working for the Techbuilt Company, an innovative mid-century pre-fabricated housing manufacturer. As such, the Coles house is an excellent example of many new ideas in modern residential architecture that were developed following World War II, including mass-production, use of new materials, and modularity. However, Coles also customized the design to suit his own needs, which included incorporating both his professional office and his family home into the structure. The building was conceived as two rectangular wings (office and home) oriented perpendicular to each other and linked by a hyphen that contains the main entrance. The separation and planning of public and private spaces is unusually and thoughtfully rendered in the Coles House and Studio, particularly in placing the office at the front of the lot and isolating private areas of the house at the rear of the property, thus shielding them from the noise and pollution of the busy expressway under construction through the neighborhood during the early 1960s. These goals were reinforced by the use of nearly solid walls with little fenestration on the front and side elevations, combined with a rear elevation that is almost entirely glass, fronting on a terrace and garden. Coles and his family have been the sole owners and occupants of the house and studio since it was built in 1961. Not only is the building structurally intact to its construction period but it retains many of the original furnishings, artwork and other elements, all of which help to convey the architect's original vision for the house.

I. Modern Residential Architecture

American residential architecture changed dramatically in the post-World War II era. The period after the war saw a severe housing shortage, changes in demographics, and an increased demand for new and affordable housing. "It is estimated that some 2,900,000 married veterans of the recent war will be in need of housing facilities by the end of the year 1946," stated a report to the U.S. House of Representatives made in February 1946. "To meet the housing emergency there is an urgent need for some 3,000,000 moderately and low-priced homes and apartments during the next two years."¹ Housing construction had practically ceased during the war, and little had been constructed in the previous decade during the Great Depression. As a result, much of the existing housing stock dated to the nineteenth century and featured substandard electrical, plumbing and heating systems. Those units which were available and affordable to the returning G.I.s were generally cramped apartment buildings, flats, or houses that had been carved up into units during the Depression.

This era also saw the rise of the automobile as a popular and affordable mode of transportation for the American family. During the post-War/Cold War era the national highway system was also developed, both for military purposes but also in response to the growing ownership and use of automobiles. As cars became increasingly affordable and prevalent in the American culture, the system of older and smaller roads, which largely dated to the early twentieth century and the early horse-and-buggy age, became clogged and crowded by the increasing auto traffic. While cities were already seen as unhealthy and unclean with pollution, noise and crowding, this sentiment was only exacerbated by the new automobile congestion. These networks of new and improved roads

¹ Quoted in "Lustron Preservation » Post-war Housing Crisis." *Lustron Preservation*. Web. 09 May 2011.
<<http://www.lustronpreservation.org/meet-the-lustrons/lustron-history/post-war-housing-crisis>>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 2

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

stretching beyond the urban cores encouraged the growth of the suburbs on the outskirts of congested cities, and these undeveloped, low-density areas with green trees and open space were thought of as ideal places to raise healthy families.

Together, the shortage of good housing stock coupled with the rise of the suburbs sparked an era of intense interest in designing and building affordable and modern single-family detached houses. One response to this cultural shift was to develop new methods of machine-made, mass-produced and pre-fabricated housing that could be manufactured affordably, quickly and efficiently. These concepts were not new, as pattern books and "kit houses" had been developed and sold across the country in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century from companies such as Sears & Roebuck and Montgomery Ward; however, these concepts and techniques were refined and modernized during this era. Architects, developers, and builders had long seen a connection between mass-production, technology and standardization in creating affordable, easy-to-build housing. In the 1940s and 50s, housing manufacturers also had the benefit of drawing on machinery, man-power and technology developed during the war to make military equipment.

II. Techbuilt and Carl Koch

The House and Studio derives much of its inspiration and construction methods, as is evidenced in its building materials, by architect Robert Coles experience working for the housing company Techbuilt. Techbuilt was a unique housing system that was developed in the 1950s by architect Carl Koch. Like other housing designs of the same era, Techbuilt was developed as a response to the demand for inexpensive, easy to construct, single-family houses. It was a time where new innovations in machinery and technology also encouraged new ideas about mass-production and pre-fabrication. This era gave rise to many innovative designs for houses, including ideas such as the Lustron House, a single-family home that could be quickly assembled on-site of pre-made enameled steel panels. Entirely new communities such as Levittown, a development which became the epitome of post-war pre-fabricated housing, were also constructed.

Techbuilt was the brainchild of architect Carl Koch. Born Albert Carl Koch in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1912, Koch studied architecture at Harvard University, receiving his Master of Architecture degree in 1937. While at Harvard, Koch witnessed the school's transition from the Beaux-Arts style educational program to the modern ideas brought by Walter Gropius, a German immigrant who became chair of the architecture department at Harvard in 1938. Gropius was a highly influential modern architect, known as the founder of the Bauhaus in Germany. In 1940-41, Koch also traveled to Sweden, where he studied in the office of Sven Markelius, a significant Swedish modern architect. Working with Markelius, Koch refined the Bauhaus inspired education he had received from Gropius, creating his own understanding of modern architecture.

Upon his return to the United States, Koch's first project was a community housing project called Snake Hill (1941) in Belmont, Massachusetts. Koch used this project as an opportunity to design an inexpensive house for himself and his family, who moved into one of the project's five houses. This project was highly influential to Koch, who decided to devote his practice to creating quality, reasonably priced housing for the post-war American family. Koch noted the shifting and rapidly growing American population at the time and felt that

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 3

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

creating prefabricated houses with interior plans that were able to change their configuration was the ideal way to meet the changing needs of these new families.

Koch's first pre-fabricated housing design was a concept for the Acorn House (1947-48). The Acorn House was designed with room units placed around a central core and its exterior created by folding stressed skin panels. These panels were engineered by John Bemis. An innovative idea, a stressed skin panel was created by impregnating a paper honeycomb with plastic, then gluing it rigidly to a sheathing material. This material was thought to have strength and insulative properties and theoretically could be produced at a low cost. The innovative and unusual Acorn House was written about and photographed for *Life* magazine and other popular publications of the time, but the building was commercially unsuccessful, as it presented significant issues with local building codes and met with resistance from some local municipalities.

Also in 1948, Carl Koch was called in to assist another pre-fabricated housing manufacturer, the Lustron Corporation, run by businessman and inventor Carl Strandlund. The Lustron Corporation, founded in 1947, had been an early pioneer in post-war pre-fabricated housing, designing houses constructed of enameled steel panels. Among Lustron's innovations were complete building kits that could be shipped to customers and assembled on site. Koch designed several new models to add to the Lustron company's product selection. He also made a thorough study of Lustron's existing equipment, processes and fabrication methods, which resulted in improvements to the structure and innovations in the plans. Unfortunately, the Lustron Corporation ceased operations in 1950, and none of Koch's new ideas or models were put into production.

Koch then turned to a more successful concept for pre-fabricated housing. In 1953 Koch invented the Techbuilt System, which would become his most commercial and critically successful idea. Drawing more from traditional residential architectural vocabularies, the Techbuilt line was more harmonious with traditional architectural forms and sympathetic to the pre-conceived concepts of residential architecture retained by many mid-twentieth century families. Techbuilt houses also relied on more traditional building materials, including wood, as opposed to the more radical plastics utilized in his Acorn House concept. Koch appears to have learned much from his experiences with the Lustron Corporation and incorporated many of the concepts and features of that product into Techbuilt, including using pre-fabricated components, assembly on-site, the notion of catalog orders, providing a limited number of basic models, and other concepts. However, unlike the rather plain and modest forms of the all-metal Lustrons, Koch's designs for Techbuilt incorporated forms such as steeply peaked roofs, were rendered in wood and natural materials, and featured open, spacious interiors. The simplicity and linear aesthetic of the Techbuilt house also reveals a modern Scandinavian influence, likely drawn from Koch's time spent in Sweden. Techbuilt houses were originally available in six different models. A catalog from the late 1950s also offered a variety of small "vacation cottages," as well as showcased the use of Techbuilt systems for college dormitories and office buildings. Techbuilt houses were among the most popular of the pre-fabricated housing available at the time; by 1963 over 3,000 kits had been sold to customers located across the country.

Techbuilt houses were designed to be affordable, quick to construct, and to meet the needs and tastes of the modern young American family. Many of the models cost less than \$20,000, depending on how many "extras"

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 4

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

were added.² More extravagant models could cost up to \$70,000. The houses were reasonably spacious, averaging about 1700-square feet, but they could be expanded to almost any size. Buyers would receive a catalog from the Techbuilt Company in which they could view the various models, options and upgrades. Once they made their selections and worked with the company to make any modifications, the kit was shipped directly from the factory to the site. Since the houses were partially pre-fabricated, parts for the building were shipped on a single truck, making even their delivery efficient. Techbuilt houses had pre-assembled wall panels, which featured fiberglass insulation. The beams were pre-cut to size, and windows and sliding glass door units were also shipped on the truck. Local franchised builders would receive the working drawings from Techbuilt containing any changes or upgrades made by the owners and oversee the on-site construction. It was noted that this system reduced the architectural fees to an average cost of \$300 in 1960.

One of the goals of Techbuilt designers was to create a residential building that contained no wasted space. Every square foot of the house was carefully and tautly designed to maximize the functionality of the building while minimizing materials, time, labor and costs. One way to increase efficiency was to eliminate the traditional basement. Instead, the foundation was incorporated into the structure of the first story, saving both money and time.

The Techbuilt house designs, which utilized a basic post-and-beam construction method based on regular modules, also maximized the flexibility of the interior space. The Techbuilt system was designed around a four-foot module, making the non-structural wall panels interchangeable and customizable both as exterior and interior walls, arranged based on the owner's needs and design. Since the post-and-beam structural system eliminated the load carrying needs of the exterior walls, this allowed for walls to be customized with solid, combination solid and window, or all window units. Owners could create as many or as few rooms as they wanted, arranged with great flexibility. Ideally, Koch envisioned that Techbuilt houses could be quickly and easily assembled, disassembled, and later reassembled in a variety of configurations. Techbuilt models were typically designed with a gabled roof without an attic, giving the vaulted interior spaces an even greater sense of volume and light.

Techbuilt houses were a product designed for the modern needs of American families in the 1950s, and the house designs were marketed utilizing the newest technology as well. In February 1954 a two-part program titled "Excursion," sponsored by the Ford Foundation, aired on television and chronicled the construction of a Techbuilt house from foundation to completion. Narrated by actor Burgess Meredith, the program was immensely popular and watched by millions of viewers. Immediately, the company was flooded with orders, many from young families looking to build affordable vacation homes. The houses were also featured in another show called "Omnibus." In utilizing this still new and exciting medium for advertising, Techbuilt may have been one of the first housing types launched by television.

² According to census data, the median family income in 1960 was \$5,620 and the cost of an average home was approximately between \$15,000 and \$16,000. No data could be found on the cost of a custom, architect-designed house from this same period. With a base price of around \$20,000 for a Techbuilt home, this would have put the cost generally in the same realm as more traditional houses, while allowing owners the opportunity to customize their Techbuilt house. Refer to <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/popscan/p60-036.pdf>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 5

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

In 1958, Koch, along with Andy Lewis, wrote a book that helped to promote and distribute his Techbuilt concepts. *At Home with Tomorrow* outlined Koch's experiences with the Techbuilt system, as well as other experiments and thoughts on prefabricated architecture. The Techbuilt house also gained public and critical accolades and was cited by the American Institute of Architects (AIA) as the "Best Development House." The *New York Times* dubbed them "The People's Choice." In the late 1950s Koch was noted as designing a number of city planning projects for Webb & Knapp Development Corporation, including a new subdivision of 185 townhouses in Buffalo (unidentified at this time). At nearly the same time, Techbuilt took on a new architect and custom design manager, hiring Robert T. Coles in 1959.

During the 1960s and 70s, Carl Koch continued to pioneer new ideas in housing. During this era, Koch moved into designing large-scale public housing. Many of these projects incorporated pre-stressed concrete components, which he called Techcrete. One of his most successful uses of this product was at the Techcrete Academy Homes (1962), located in Roxbury, Massachusetts.

Throughout his career, Carl Koch sought to find new, cost-effective housing technologies and designs to accommodate the needs of the modern American. Whether it was through his Modernist-inspired Techbuilt houses or his Techcrete systems, Koch was a pioneer of twentieth-century ideas in housing. In 1994 Koch was crowned the "Grandfather of Prefab" by *Progressive Architecture* magazine, capping a successful career as a pioneer in reinventing modern American residential architecture. He died on February 3, 1998 at the age of 86. Carl Koch's philosophies on creating affordable, flexible and modern housing influenced many architects and designers, including Robert T. Coles.

III. Robert Traynham Coles, RA, FAIA

From his start working for Carl Koch in 1959, Robert Traynham Coles has become one of Buffalo's most prominent and respected architects. Coles has contributed many notable and award-winning architectural projects to the area and has also played an active role in the local, regional and national architectural community through lectures, teaching, professional activities, and in other endeavors.

Robert Traynham Coles was born in Buffalo on August 24, 1929, one of four sons born to George Edward and Helena Vesta Traynham Coles. George Coles worked as a postal worker, an occupation that provided a rare financial stability to the family during the Depression era. As a result, the Coles family was often one of few African American families in many of the neighborhoods in which they lived. In the era before the Civil Rights movement, Coles was one of only a handful of African American students in his elementary school. Later Coles attended the Technical High School (now known as Hutchinson Technical High School), where, of the 1,800 students, enrollment of African-American students was limited to only a dozen. In 1943 Coles was placed in a course called building design. During the height of World War II, when new construction was at a virtual stand-still, this was an unpopular and undesirable class at the school. However, it was in this class that Coles gained a new perspective on the world and was inspired to pursue a career as an architect.

After graduation, Coles attended Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) in Virginia between 1947 and 1949. Dissatisfied with the architectural curriculum at the school, Coles transferred to the University of

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 6

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

Minnesota. Here, Coles received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1951 and a Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1953. After graduation, Coles entered the architectural program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and in 1955 he earned his Master of Architecture degree.

Despite his absence from Buffalo for eight years while he attended school, Coles's graduate thesis at MIT involved the city of his birth. In a combined research and design thesis, Coles created an urban renewal project for the neighborhood in which he had attended high school. Titled "Community Facilities in Redevelopment Areas, A Study and Proposal for the Ellicott District in Buffalo, New York," the project was created with the Buffalo Urban League as the client. Coles's thesis reached a receptive audience in Western New York and was widely publicized in Buffalo.

Following his graduation from MIT, Coles won the prestigious Rotch Traveling Scholarship awarded by the Boston Society of Architects. Coles, his wife, Sylvia, and the couple's young son subsequently spent the next year traveling throughout Europe. Upon their return, Coles entered the Boston architectural firm of Perry, Shaw, Hepburn and Dean as an intern architect. In 1957-58, Coles worked as an architect for the notable Boston firm of Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson and Abbott. While at the latter firm, Coles worked on several projects, including buildings at Harvard University and Dartmouth College. Coles then worked for a year with Carl Koch and Associates and a year with Advance Planning Associates. While working for Koch, Coles contributed to the firm's work on the Metropolitan Boston Arts Center and designed a housing project in Brookline, Massachusetts. From 1959 until 1960, Coles worked as architect and custom design manager for Techbuilt, Inc., where he designed and built over 200 buildings throughout the eastern United States.

In 1960, Coles realized every young architect's dream when he received word that his thesis project was being commissioned. Coles and his family left Boston and returned to Buffalo to design and construct his Ellicott District Recreation Center. Today this project, located just south of Clinton Street in Buffalo's Willert Park neighborhood, is known as the John F. Kennedy Recreation Center. During construction of the recreation center, Coles worked as coordinating architect with the firm of DeLeuw, Cather and Brill. Following the completion of the project in 1963, Coles established his own architectural firm, Robert Traynham Coles, Architect pc. Still in operation in 2011, Coles's practice is the oldest African American owned architectural firm in New York State and in the Northeast.³

In the early 1960s, Coles became an outspoken advocate for a downtown presence for the new campus proposed for the University at Buffalo. In 1962, the University at Buffalo (UB) was absorbed into the State University of New York (SUNY) system. During the early 1960s, enrollment at UB was rapidly surpassing the capacity of its small campus, located at Main Street and Bailey Avenue in the city's northern area. Projections indicated that by 1975 UB's enrollment could reach over 40,000 students, prompting the need for an expanded new campus. Five sites were initially reviewed for the new campus; however, only two sites were serious contenders: one located in downtown Buffalo adjacent to the waterfront, and another located in the suburbs of Amherst. In 1963, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller commissioned a study of the two sites. Although

³ "Uncrowned King: Robert Traynham Coles." *University at Buffalo - Wings Central Campus Web Server*. Web. 04 Nov. 2010. <http://wings.buffalo.edu/uncrownedqueens/K/bios/C/coles_robert_traynham.html>.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8 Page 7

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

urban planners found the waterfront site optimal for the new campus, in 1964 the governor and the UB trustees recommended development of the new campus in Amherst. Between this decision and the ground-breaking for the campus (now known as North Campus) in late 1967, many people continued to advocate for the downtown waterfront campus. Among them was Coles, who believed that the downtown campus would be more convenient for the city's lower-income inner-city residents, who could not afford to commute to the northern suburbs. In 1966-57, when he was only in his mid-30s, Coles chaired a committee of civic leaders campaigning for the downtown site. Despite losing the debate, Coles's firm was later commissioned to design UB's \$27 million Health, Physical Education and Recreation complex, later renamed Alumni Arena, built 1979-1985 on the new North Campus in Amherst. While a win for Amherst, the loss of North Campus to Amherst is considered by many to have had devastating impact for Buffalo's downtown.

Coles's resume reflects his focus on large-scale commercial and civic projects rather than on residential architecture. While examples of his residential designers are relatively few (refer to Sections VI and VII), there are several residential projects that reflect Coles's style and design philosophy. The residence for Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Berlyn, constructed in 1965 in Worcester, Massachusetts, shares some similarities in form and materials with Coles's home. Like the Coles house, the Berlyn house features a centrally located circulation core in a split-level configuration. Located on a dramatically sloping site, the Berlyn house makes use of a cantilevered living room, which features a carport below, that is reminiscent of the cantilever employed by Coles for his own living room. Buildings such as the weekend house for Dr. Lydia Wright and Dr. Frank Evans, constructed in Attica, NY in 1968, are similar in materials to the Coles residence. While the two houses share simple rectangular massing, the Wright-Evans house also uses wood post-and-beam structure coupled with wood plank ceilings and large expanses of glass that are similar to the Coles house. The weekend house for Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Ravin (1970, Ellicottville, NY) is perhaps the most similar to the Coles house. This design features a cantilevered living room with a recessed porch, nearly identical in appearance to that at the Coles residence. Coles's residential projects all share a similar, minimalistic, Scandinavian-inspired modernist design, utilizing natural materials, including wood and stone. While varying in form and configuration, Coles's residential designs all share a compact, simple and functional design that minimizes wasted space and incorporates storage and utility spaces efficiently within the building without a traditional basement or attic. Coles believes that these similarities in form, materials and design stem from his clients' appreciation of the design and appearance of his own house.

In 1961, Coles joined the American Institute of Architects. At the 1968 conference held in Portland, Coles heard civil rights leader and fellow MIT alumnus Whitney Young issue his famous keynote address, challenging the architectural profession to become more engaged and involved in the urban crisis. Active in a variety of social causes and using architecture on behalf of the overall improvement in the community, Coles was instrumental in starting the Community Planning Assistance Center of Western New York (CPAC), a community design center to bring technical assistance to community organizations that sought to develop their neighborhoods but lacked funding to pay for assistance. Coles served as AIA's deputy vice president of minority affairs from 1974-1976 and received an honorary Doctorate of Letters from Medaille College in 1977 in recognition of this leadership. Because of his continued commitment to social equality in the architectural profession, Coles was awarded the AIA's Whitney M. Young, Jr. Citation, the AIA's second highest award, in 1981. Also in 1981, Coles was made a Fellow of the AIA, a prestigious recognition of his service to the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 8

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

architectural community. In 1989 Coles made what he feels was his most significant contribution to the field of architecture when, as Langston Hughes Professor of Architecture and Urban Design at the University of Kansas, his inaugural lecture, "Black Architects, An Endangered Species" was published as a guest editorial in *Progressive Architecture*.

In the 1980s and 90s, while continuing his architectural practice in Buffalo, Coles served as a professor at other colleges and universities. Between 1990 and 1995 he was an associate professor of architecture at Carnegie Mellon University. He also served in a variety of visiting positions at the University at Buffalo and at the University at Kansas. Coles also served on the juries for several notable projects, including the U.S. Post Office National Design Competition, the City Plaza National Design Competition in Lexington, and the State Association of Architects Design Awards in New York City.

The list of civic, political and philanthropic activities and groups to which Robert T. Coles has joined or participated is long. He served as council member of the Burchfield Art Center; Arts in America; Erie County Horizons Waterfront Commission, Board of Directors; Built a New City, Inc.; Preservation League of New York State, and many others. Coles also served as a fellow of the AIA on numerous committees and task forces and served as an honorary trustee of the Western New York Public Broadcasting Station since 1987. He is a member of Alpha Kappa Mu, the National Organization of Minority Architects, in which group he has served a variety of leadership roles. The many awards Robert T. Coles has received throughout his career include an AIA Award of Merit, received in 1963 for his personal residence. Coles was also been honored by the AIA New York State Chapter in 2004 in recognition of his lifetime service as an architect.

Robert Traynham Coles continues to practice, focusing on large-scale projects located primarily in Buffalo and Western New York. Coles has devoted his life to the betterment of his community and the people in it through a wide variety of professional, educational and service activities and involvement. The affordable, adaptable and efficient design and construction of his own residence and studio reflects his concepts about affordable housing in urban neighborhoods. Energized by a lifetime committed towards using architecture for social activism, Coles's ideas about what an architect is, and should be, are best summarized by statements made in 2004:

*[Architects] must in their works, build the demonstrative alternative to the way we live today. They must be initiators as well as implementers – leaders more than followers. They must truly be revolutionaries who see their architecture as a broad movement to enhance the quality of life of urban people.*⁴

IV. History of the Robert T. Coles House and Studio

⁴ Robert Traynham Coles. "Going to Play, and Not Work," *The Monroe Fordham Regional History Center*. Buffalo State College, 4 Nov. 2004. Web. <http://www.monroefordham.org/docs/coles_robert_traynham_autobio.pdf>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 9

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

Although he had initially planned on building his home in Massachusetts, in 1961 Coles returned to his hometown of Buffalo to design and build the Ellicott District Recreation Center. With a young family and a busy architectural practice to accommodate, the need for housing was imperative. Coles quickly adapted the plans he had developed to his new situation and new setting, reflecting his belief in a universal design, a design theory that created a generic, flexible design for a building that could be translated to a variety of settings and sites.

Coles selected a parcel of land on Humboldt Parkway in the Hamlin Park neighborhood.⁵ Using many of the materials, designs and concepts of the Techbuilt system, Coles was able to complete the design in only three months and construction in an additional three months. Coles's house is unlike any of the surrounding houses in the early twentieth century Hamlin Park neighborhood, which is dominated by American Foursquare and Craftsman style buildings, typically with spacious front porches facing the street. With its low, non-descript, rectilinear presence, shielded from Humboldt Parkway by shrubs and fences, the Robert T. Coles House and Studio presents a contrast to its traditionally designed neighbors. While adjacent houses were designed to feature public spaces fronting right onto the street, Coles's house and studio was designed with a rather utilitarian façade facing onto the busy Scajaquada Expressway/Kensington Expressway interchange and private areas located on the interior of the property.

For much of the early twentieth century, this area was comparable to other parkway neighborhoods in Buffalo, featuring the Olmsted-designed Humboldt Parkway, a lush green ribbon of grass and trees which served as a slice of parkland running throughout the neighborhood. The majority of the houses in Hamlin Park were built during the parkway era, when the street was a spacious 150-foot wide park-like lawn used for socializing, recreation and outdoor activities. In response, houses were designed with their primary façade facing towards the grassy green park, often with spacious porches that bridged the transition between the tranquil, public parkway and the building, welcoming people to linger there. Coles's house reflects a new age in this neighborhood, where automobile traffic replaced the horse and buggy. At the time Coles purchased the parcel in 1961, construction of the expressway had just begun. In the span of a few years, the serene tree-lined ribbon of Humboldt Parkway was excavated for a sunken multi-lane roadway, which funneled traffic in and out of the city at a new pace. The new highway would not be completed until 1968; however, Coles anticipated that this new expressway would bring noise and pollution to the neighborhood. In response, Coles designed his house and studio in a new and innovative way. As the architect described it shortly after construction, "I deliberately understated the house from the street because I feel that a house should be primarily for the people who reside in it and their guests."⁶

The Robert T. Coles House and Studio was designed with sensitivity to sheltering private spaces from the noise and traffic, while making the public spaces accessible to the street. On a large scale, the two units, public and

⁵ Of note, Sanborn maps indicate the presence of another house on the site now occupied by the Coles House, on a large corner parcel. This large frame dwelling, identified as 325 Humboldt Parkway, appears to date to the late 1800s, possibly ca. 1890, and was noted as being the home of William T. Hornaday in 1894-95. Between 1899 and 1903, the house at 325 Humboldt Parkway served as the Salvation Army's Rescue Home for Fallen Women. Between the 1910s and 1930s, it was home to James Smith, a wealthy Irish-born cattle dealer. The large parcel appears to have been subdivided by 1935, and the house demolished by 1950; at least a decade before Coles purchased property here for his house. Refer to 1894-95 City Directory, page 367. Also, Josephus Nelson Larned. A *History of Buffalo, Delineating the Evolution of the City*. Vol. II. New York City: Progress of the Empire State, 1911; page 100.

⁶ Quoted in Ellen Taussig, "Buffalo Architect Wins Award for Unique House on Narrow Lot," *Buffalo Evening News*, 9 Nov. 1963. Print. Copy provided by R.T. Coles.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8 Page 10

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

**Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State**

private, are separate from each other, maximizing the separation of the two spaces in the overall building itself. The public unit (the office and studio) is located adjacent to the street, making it accessible for the staff, clients, public and others to access at grade. Private areas (the house) are located at the rear of the property, sheltering spaces such as bedrooms and family spaces from the noise of the street overlooking the rear court and garden. This configuration meant that the elevation visible from the street consisted primarily of a garage door rather than an elegant front porch. The spacious porch is still evident at Coles's house, but it has been located facing the rear court to the south of the property, overlooking a quiet, tranquil yard and a lush canopy of trees.

Similarly, each elevation of the building was designed with a special awareness of private and public spaces within and their relationship to the landscape and setting without. Thanks to the flexibility of the non-structural wall panels, drawn from the Techbuilt system, walls could range from open and transparent to solid and impermeable. Coles's house and studio feature primarily solid walls facing the street to the north, shielding it from the noise of the expressway just a few feet away. The building also generally features solid wall panels on the east and west facades, providing a sense of privacy from the adjacent houses. The western wall of the studio, a space requiring good lighting for drawing and drafting, also features large windows. Here, as a measure of privacy for the studio, a large courtyard and sculpture garden, which features works given to Coles by sculptor Jack Solomon, is also located, enclosed by shrubs and plants to afford additional quiet and tranquility. On the southern façade of the private unit, the wall is composed nearly entirely of large window units and floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors, allowing for light to flood the interior. Facing into the private rear court, this façade is permeable to the light and natural environment of the yard.

Although the Coles house and studio incorporate many of the ideas, concepts and materials of the Techbuilt system into its design, the building is a custom-designed home built to meet the needs of Coles and his family. The Douglas fir post-and-beam structural system of Coles's house and studio are directly from the Techbuilt model; however, the Coles house has a flat roof rather than the more typical gable roof found in Techbuilt houses. Pre-fabricated wall panels and factory-ready windows and sliding glass door units were also used, proving to be a great time-saver. Like the Techbuilt model, the Coles house and studio is constructed without a basement level; instead, the foundation was incorporated into the lower level of the house. Also similar to the two-story Techbuilt models, the master bedroom was located on the upper level, and additional bedrooms were on the lower level. Coles also made a number of modifications to the Techbuilt house designs, including running the beams in an opposite direction, eliminating the vaulted interior spaces, and carefully controlling solid versus transparent walls to adapt to the more urban environment (many of the Techbuilt houses were built as beach properties rather than city residences). Also, the manner in which Coles divided public and private spaces into two separate units, connected by a transitional hyphen space, is his own innovation.

The Robert T. Coles House and Studio is an award-winning project recognized by the architectural community. In 1963, the house was awarded the New York State Association of Architects' "Award of Merit" for its excellence in design. Coles was recognized for his outstanding work in the category of excellence in design by his peers with this award. The Robert T. Coles House and Studio is part of a long line of architects' homes and studios. Like the homes of other architects, the Coles house reflected its designer's architectural philosophies and served as a model for his functional, efficient, flexible and affordable design ideas. Coles's house embodies his ideas on affordable, socially conscious housing, as well as the architectural designs and theories of

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 8 Page 11

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

mid-twentieth century modern architecture.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO

Section 8 Page 12

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

VI. EXAMPLES OF OTHER RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PROJECTS (provided by R.T. Coles)

- 1970 Weekend House for Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Ravin – Ellicottville, NY (\$50,000)
- 1968 Weekend House for Dr. Lydia Wright and Dr. Frank Evans – Attica, NY (\$40,000)
- 1965 Residence for Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Berlyn – Worcester, MA (\$100,000)

VII. LIST OF COMPLETED NON-RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PROJECTS (provided by R.T. Coles)

- 2007 Public School 128 Design – Queens, NY
- 2006 Public School 118 Feasibility Study – Bronx, NY
- 2006 Program Study, Middle College High School – Buffalo, NY
- 2006 Frank E. Merriweather Jr. Branch Library – Buffalo, NY
- 2005 School #36 Renovation – Buffalo, NY
- 2001 Johnnie P. Wiley Pavilion Offices – Buffalo, NY
- 2001 JFK Playground Shelter – Buffalo, NY
- 2000 Renovation of Apollo Theater into Public Access Television Station – Buffalo, NY
- 2000 Langston Hughes Center Renovation – Buffalo, NY
- 1999 Ralph Wilson Stadium Lower Bowl Seating Replacement – Orchard Park, NY
- 1998 Harlem Hospital Center-New Ambulatory Care Facility – New York, NY
- 1998 Public School 233 Addition & Modernization – Brooklyn, NY
- 1998 Reconstruction of Westside & Genesee Street Community Center – Buffalo, NY
- 1997 Ph. II-Friends to the Elderly Center Renovation – Buffalo, NY
- 1997 Renovation of 945 Genesee Street – Buffalo, NY
- 1997 Conway Field Shelter/Concession Stand – Buffalo, NY
- 1996 Offices for Watts Engineers – Buffalo, NY
- 1994 Tauriello-Lakeview Homes – Buffalo, NY
- 1994 Geneva B. Scruggs Center, 1461 Main Street, Renovation – Buffalo, NY
- 1994 Geneva B. Scruggs Intermediate Care Facility – Buffalo, NY
- 1993 War Memorial Stadium Demolitions & Construction of New Athletic Facility – Buffalo, NY
- 1992 Business Office Building and Campus Demolition, College of Staten Island, NY
- 1991 Albion Community Residence – Albion, NY
- 1990 Gethsemane Baptist Church, Addition – Buffalo, NY
- 1990 State University College at Brockport Roof Replacement Projects – Brockport, NY
- 1990 Human Services Office Building, County of Ontario, NY – Canandaigua, NY
- 1990 Geneva B. Scruggs Health Care Renovation, Women & Children's Unit – Buffalo, NY
- 1990 Wende Correctional Facility, Renovation/New Construction – Alden, NY
- 1989 Research Institute on Alcoholism Renovation – Buffalo, NY
- 1988 Erie Community College City Campus, Teaching Kitchen, Phase II – Buffalo, NY
- 1988 Asarese-Matters Recreation Center – Buffalo, NY
- 1987 Gowanda Psychiatric Center Rehab Treatment Center – Gowanda, NY
- 1987 Health, Physical Education & Recreation Complex, Phase II – Natatorium
- 1987 State University of New York at Buffalo, Amherst Campus – Amherst, NY
- 1987 Bidwell Station Post Office – Buffalo, NY
- 1986 Burgard Vocational High School Addition & Reconstruction – Buffalo, NY
- 1986 Buffalo Psychiatric Center Dining Room Addition – Buffalo, NY
- 1986 Frank Reeves Municipal Center – Washington, DC
- 1985 Repair & Alteration Program, Buffalo/Western New York Post Offices
- 1985 Erie Community College City Campus, Teaching Kitchen, Phase I – Buffalo, NY
- 1984 Utica Station – Buffalo, NY
- 1984 Removal of Architectural Barrier, Varies Resident Engineers Offices – Western New York
- 1984 Providence Railroad Station – Providence, RI

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Section 8 Page 13

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

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| 1983 | South Park Yards & Shops – Buffalo, NY |
| 1983 | Health, Physical Education & Recreation Complex, Phase I – Alumni Arena
State University of New York at Buffalo, Amherst Campus – Amherst, NY |
| 1983 | 157 Delaware Avenue Renovation – Buffalo, NY |
| 1983 | Lindbergh Center Station – Atlanta, GA |
| 1983 | Operations Control Center – Buffalo, NY |
| 1983 | Port of Entry Restaurant – Amherst, NY |
| 1982 | William-Emslie YMCA – Buffalo, NY |
| 1982 | Jefferson Avenue Façade Signage and Rehabilitation Program – Buffalo, NY |
| 1982 | Façade Rehabilitation for Hertel Avenue Stores – Buffalo, NY |
| 1981 | Niagara Community Center & Girls Club – Buffalo, NY |
| 1981 | 5 Spaces, VA Medical Center, Renovation – Buffalo, NY |
| 1981 | VA Medical Center Supply Processing, Renovation – Buffalo, NY |
| 1981 | Rosalia Street Telephone Garage, Renovation – Buffalo, NY |
| 1980 | One Niagara Square, Renovation – Buffalo, NY |
| 1979 | Federal Office Building, Renovation – Buffalo NY |
| 1978 | West Seneca Branch Post Office – West Seneca, NY |
| 1978 | Sherman L. Walker Human Services Center, Renovation – Buffalo, NY |
| 1974 | Public School 40 – Buffalo, NY |
| 1974 | Sperry Playground – Buffalo, NY |
| 1974 | Perry Day Care Center – Buffalo, NY |
| 1973 | Ellicott Neighborhood Advisory Council/UDC Housing Project – Buffalo, NY |
| 1973 | Northeast Neighborhood Facility – Rochester, NY |
| 1972 | Urban Park Housing Development – Rochester, NY |
| 1972 | Sherman L. Walker Human Services Center – Buffalo, NY |
| 1971 | Bacon Hall, Renovation – Buffalo, NY |
| 1968 | Local 34, Inc., Renovation – Buffalo, NY |
| 1967 | Friendship House of Lackawanna – Lackawanna, NY |
| 1967 | Joseph J. Kelly Gardens, Housing for the Elderly – Buffalo, NY |
| 1967 | Sample Memorial Playground – Chautauqua, NY |
| 1964 | Lanigan Field House – Buffalo, NY |
| 1963 | John F. Kennedy Recreation Center (originally named Ellicott District Recreation Center) – Buffalo, NY |

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 1

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 2

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

Taussig, Ellen. "Buffalo Architect Wins Award for Unique House on Narrow Lot." *Buffalo Evening News* 9 Nov. 1963. Print. Copy provided by R.T. Coles

"Uncrowned King: Robert Traynham Coles." *University at Buffalo - Wings Central Campus Web Server*. Web. 04 Nov. 2010. <http://wings.buffalo.edu/uncrownedqueens/K/bios/C/coles_robert_traynham.html>.

Also thanks to Robert T. Coles who provided materials for this nomination including articles, catalogs and papers from the Techbuilt company, his own career and projects, architectural plans for his house, historic photos and other materials.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 1

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

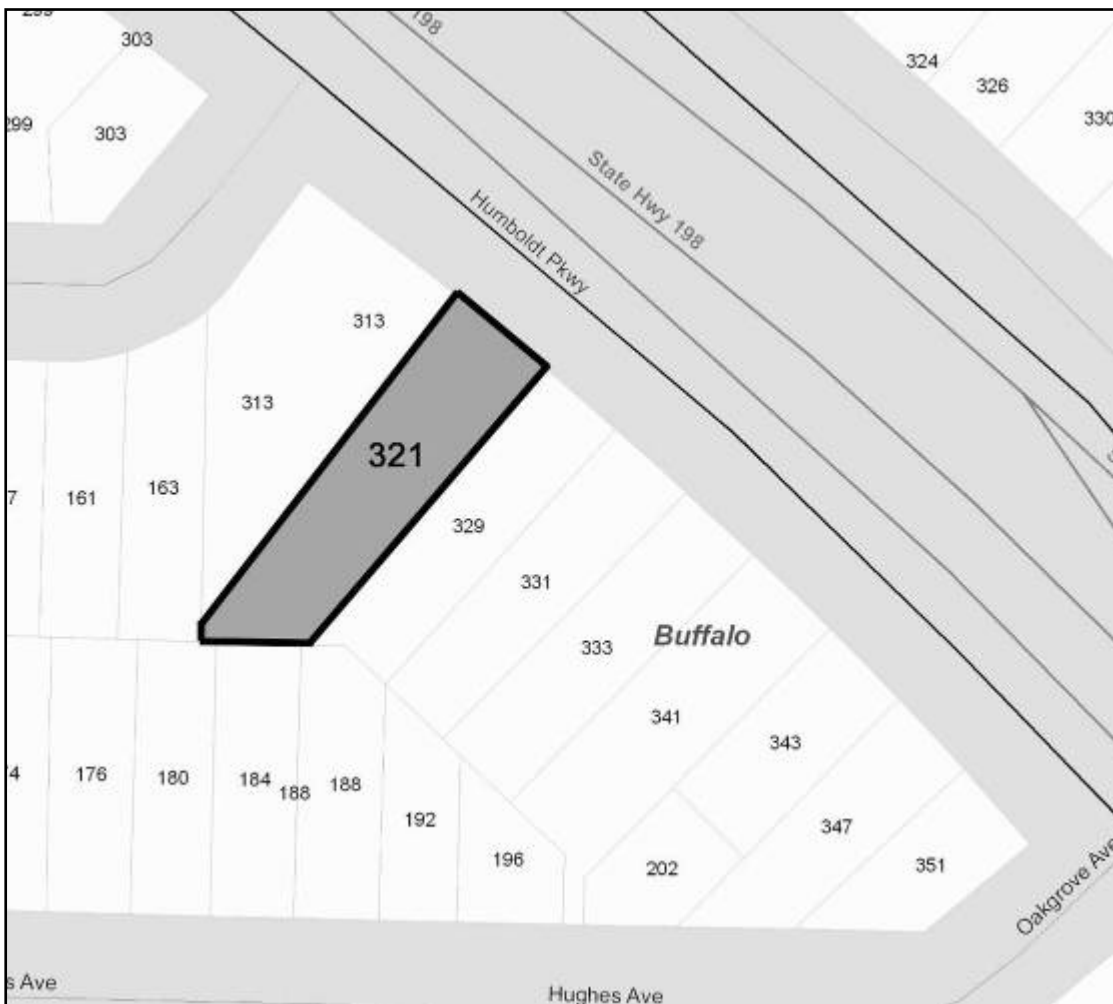
Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

10.0 BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Robert T. Coles House and Studio is located on a roughly rectangular shaped 0.181-acre plot measuring approximately 50-feet wide by 174-feet in depth in the City of Buffalo at 321 Humboldt Parkway between Loring Avenue and Oakgrove Avenue/ Hughes Avenue. It is bordered by residential parcels on all sides.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The historic boundary of the resource is in keeping with the historic lands associated with the house and studio since its construction in 1961.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 1

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

11.0A SANBORN MAP

11.0B FLOOR PLANS

- 1.) Robert T. Coles House and Studio – Site Plan
- 2.) Robert T. Coles House and Studio – Lower Floor & Basement Plan
- 3.) Robert T. Coles House and Studio – Ground Floor & Upper Floor Plan
- 4.) Diagram of the Coles House and Studio – Diagram of the units of the house, created by Jennifer Walkowski

11.0C HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS Provided by Robert T. Coles

- 1.) Unknown Lustron House designed by Carl Koch and Associates, ca. 1948 (from *Progressive Architecture*, page 108)
- 2.) Techbuilt model Devon 442, ca. late-1950s (from a Techbuilt catalog provided by R.T. Coles)
- 3.) Techbuilt Custom Design in Cambridge, Mass, ca. late-1950s (from a Techbuilt catalog provided by R.T. Coles)
- 4.) Techbuilt Vacation Cottage, ca. late-1950s (from a Techbuilt catalog provided by R.T. Coles)
- 5.) Techbuilt Vacation Cottage, ca. late-1950s (from a Techbuilt catalog provided by R.T. Coles)
- 6.) Exploded Perspective Drawing of Construction of a Techbuilt House, 1959 (from *Progressive Architecture*, page 105)
- 7.) Assembling a Techbuilt Beach House, ca. 1960s (From *Weekend Utopia*, page 122)
- 8.) “The Freedom House” Techbuilt Advertisement, May 11, 1970 (from *New York Magazine*)
- 9.) The Staff of Robert Traynham Coles, Architect, PC. Then located at 1151 Main Street, Buffalo, 1970-1975 (Provided by R.T. Coles)
- 10.) Robert Traynham Coles, with image of UB’s Alumni Arena under construction, ca. 1982-85 (from *Western NY Heritage* magazine)
- 11.) Perspective Sketch, Weekend House for Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Ravin, Ellicottville, NY, 1970 (Provided by R.T. Coles)
- 12.) Second Floor Plan, Weekend House for Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Ravin, Ellicottville, NY, 1970 (Provided by R.T. Coles)
- 13.) Site Plan, Weekend House for Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Ravin, Ellicottville, NY, 1970 (Provided by R.T. Coles)

Photographs of house taken by Gerard Myers, MYERS Photographs, Inc.
257 Franklin Street
Buffalo, New York
ca. 1963

- 14.) North elevation from Humboldt Pkwy (ca. 1963)
- 15.) North elevation from sidewalk (ca. 1963)
- 16.) South elevation (ca. 1963)
- 17.) South elevation and rear court, showing landscaping (ca. 1963)
- 18.) Interior, Living Room (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 2

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

-
-
- 19.) Interior, Living Room (ca. 1963)
 - 20.) Interior, Living Room (ca. 1963)
 - 21.) Interior, Master Bedroom (ca. 1963)
 - 22.) Interior, Kitchen (ca. 1963)
 - 23.) Interior, Kitchen looking into Dining Area (ca. 1963)
 - 24.) Interior, Kitchen/ Dining Area looking out onto sunken patio and rear court (ca. 1963)
 - 25.) Interior, Main Staircase (ca. 1963)

11.0D CURRENT PHOTOGRAPHS

Taken by Jennifer Walkowski, Clinton Brown Company Architecture, October 2010

- 1.) North elevation from street
- 2.) North elevation in courtyard
- 3.) View looking south-east showing Sculpture Garden/Courtyard and Studio Unit
- 4.) South elevation showing intact landscaping
- 5.) South elevation, detail
- 6.) Interior, Living Room
- 7.) Interior, Living Room
- 8.) Interior, Kitchen
- 9.) Interior, Kitchen
- 10.) Interior, Original 1961 light fixture
- 11.) Model of Coles House and Studio (dates to 1996)
- 12.) Model of Coles House and Studio (dates to 1996)

Additional research and assistance provided by:

Meagan Baco, Historic Preservation Project Assistant
Clinton Brown Company Architecture, pc

11.0A SANBORN MAP

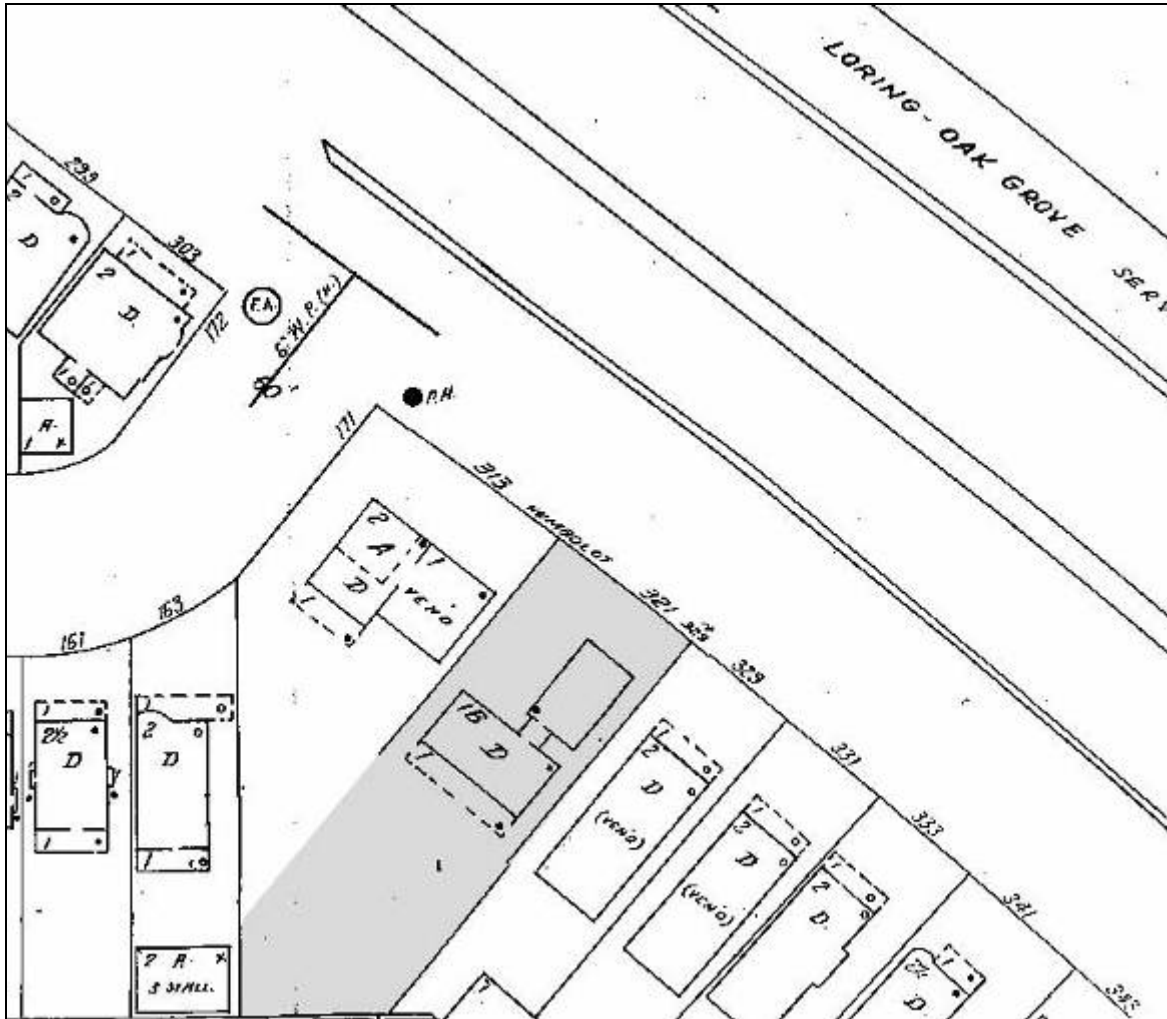
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 3

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Detail, Sanborn Map (June 1986)

This map shows the orientation and location of the Robert T. Coles House and Studio at 321 Humboldt Parkway, and its surrounds.

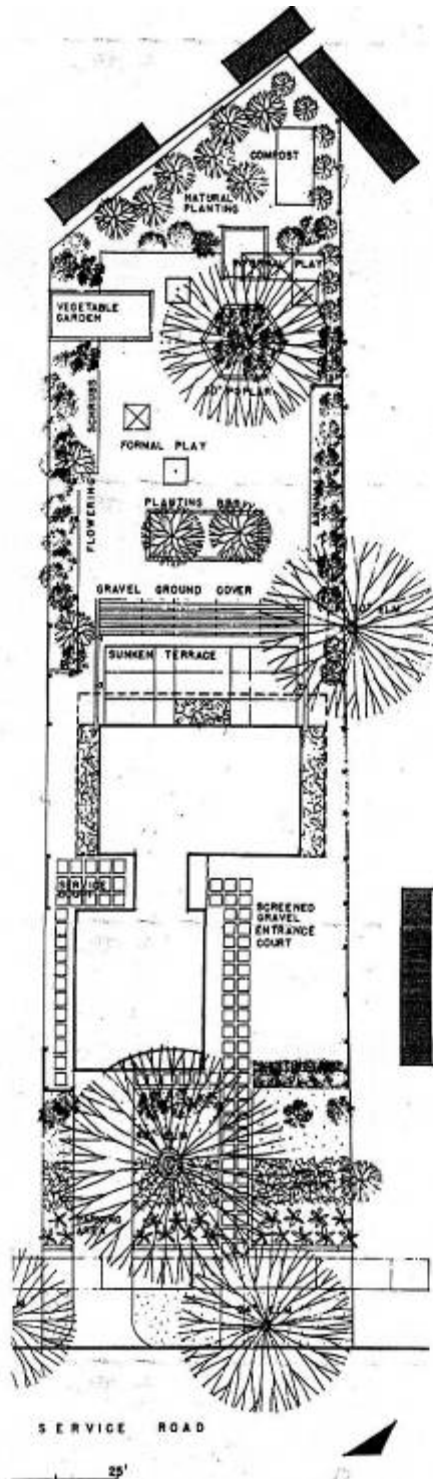
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 4

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



**Robert T. Coles House and
Studio
Site Plan**

A comprehensive landscape plan integrates the building and interiors with the surrounding parcel. The building, interiors and landscape are all remarkably intact.

North
V

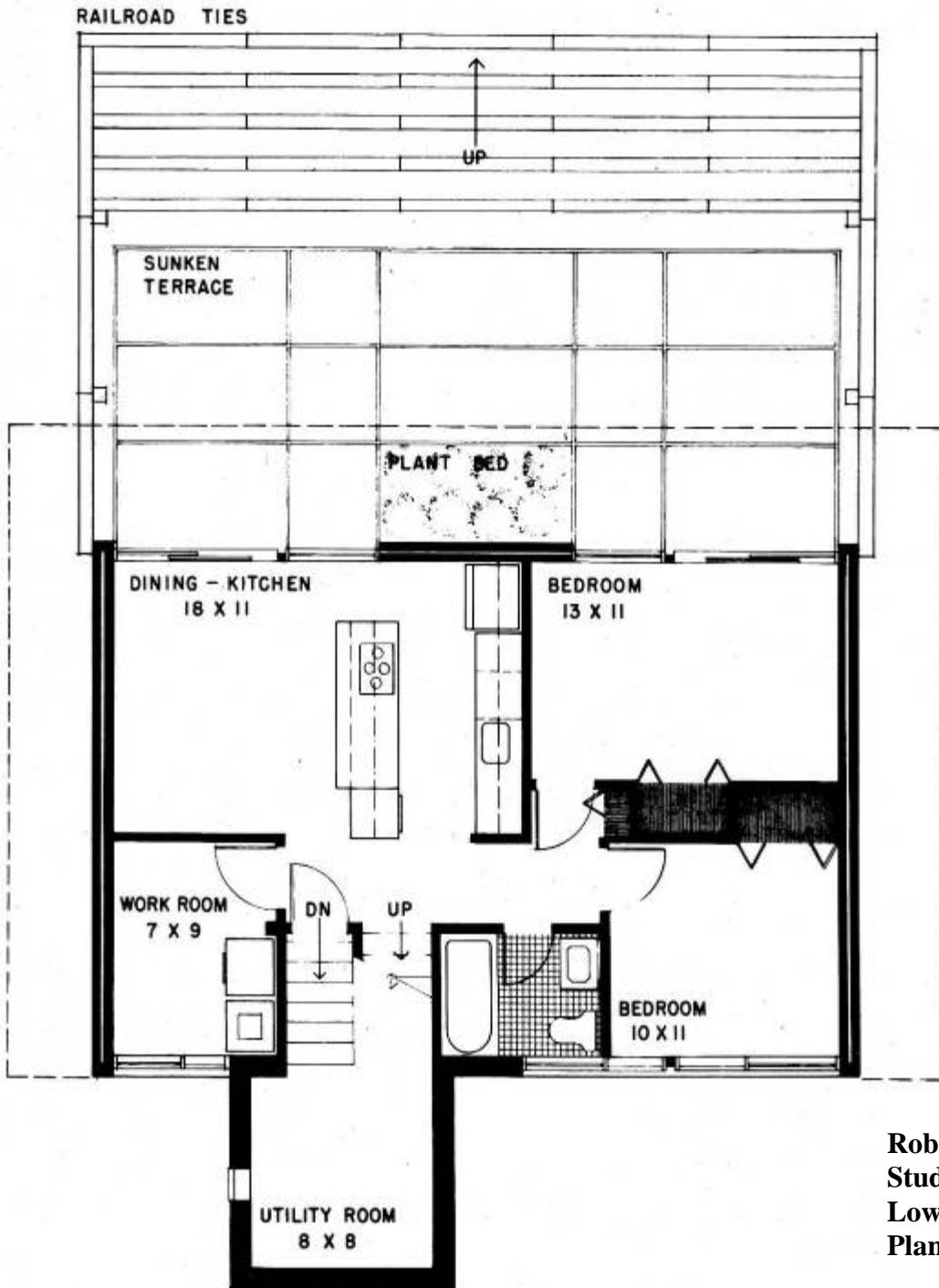
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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 5

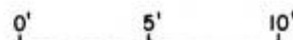
**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and
Studio
Lower Floor & Basement
Plan

LOWER FLOOR & BASEMENT



North
V

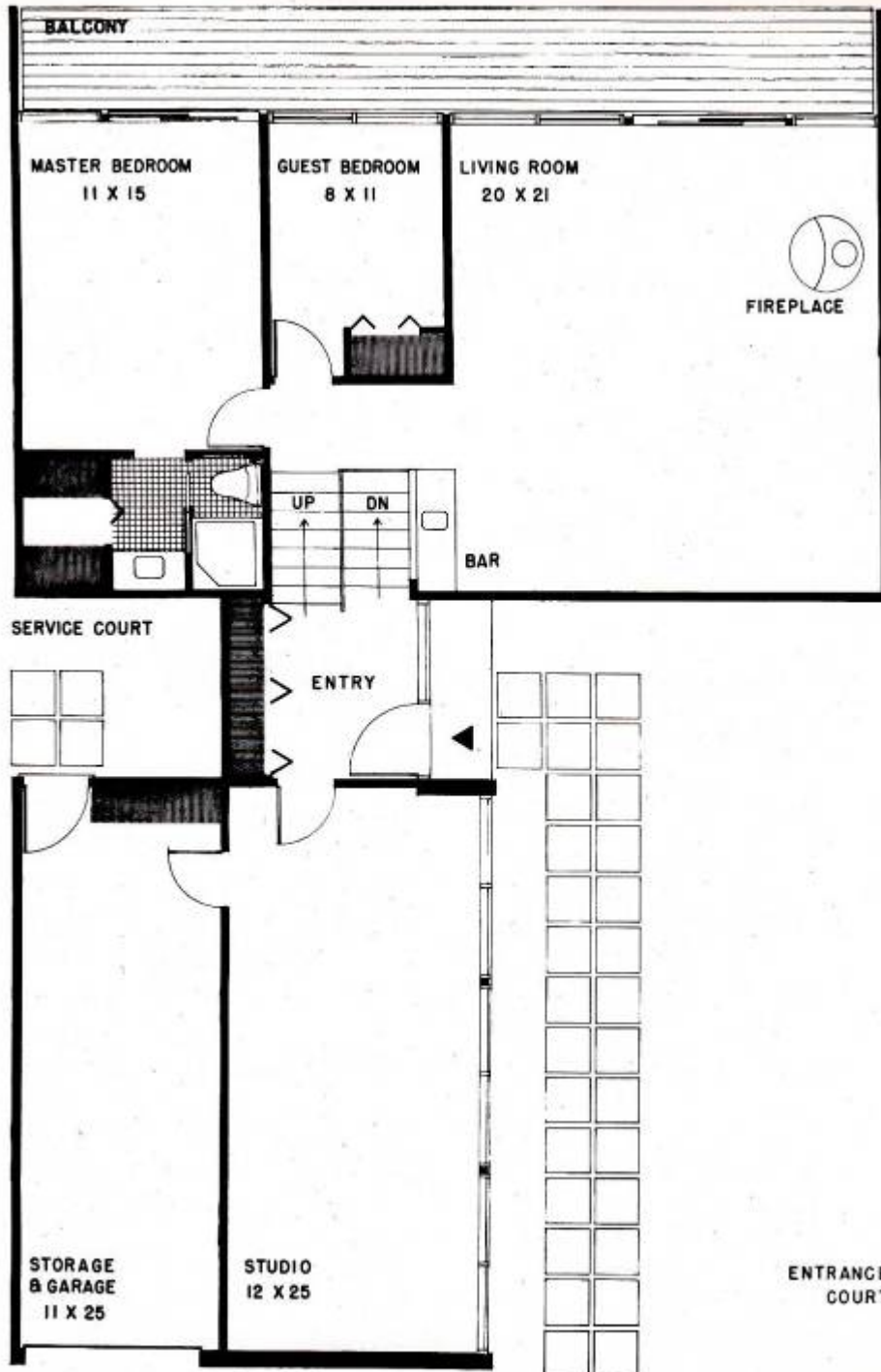
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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 6

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



GROUND FLOOR & UPPER FLOOR

0' 5' 10'

Robert T. Coles House and
Studio
Ground Floor & Upper Floor
Plan

North
V

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 7

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

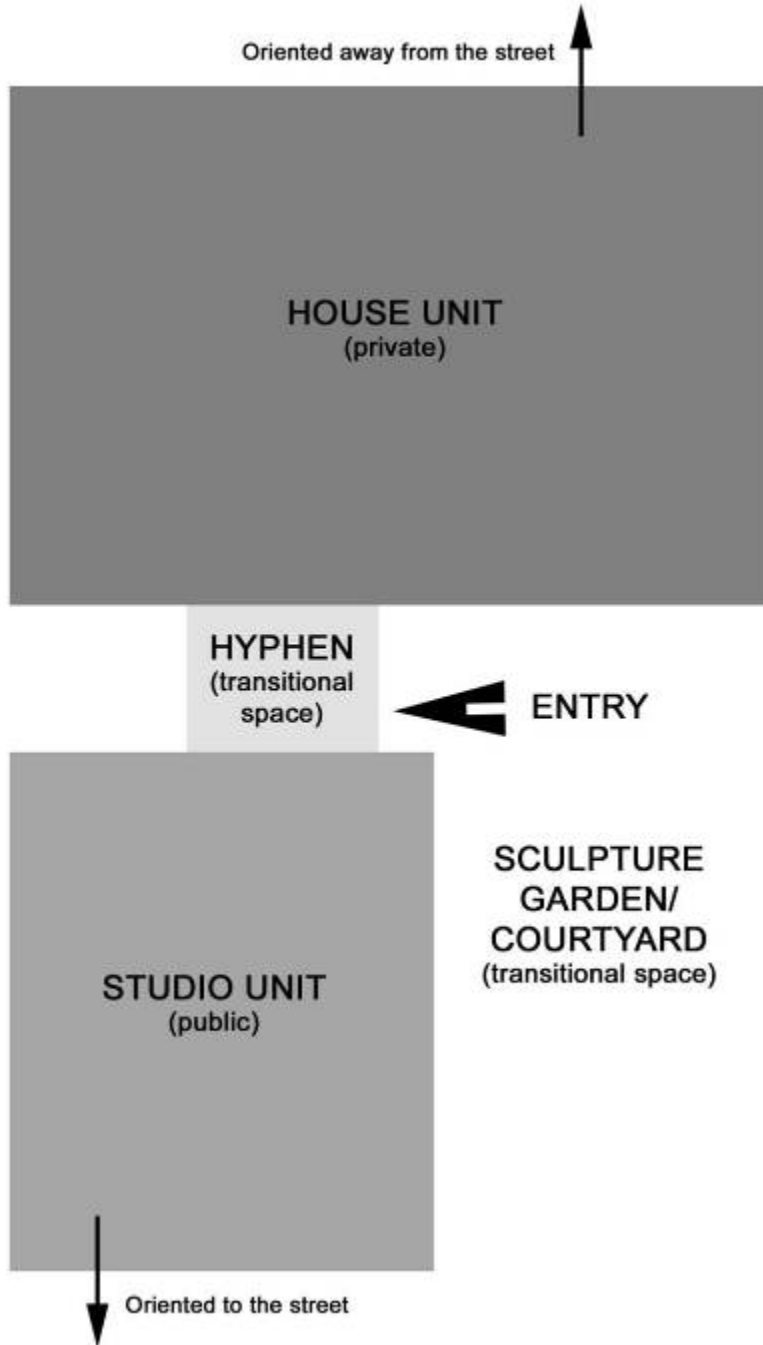


Diagram of the Coles House and Studio

Showing the different units which make up the building, as well as their relationship to public and private use.

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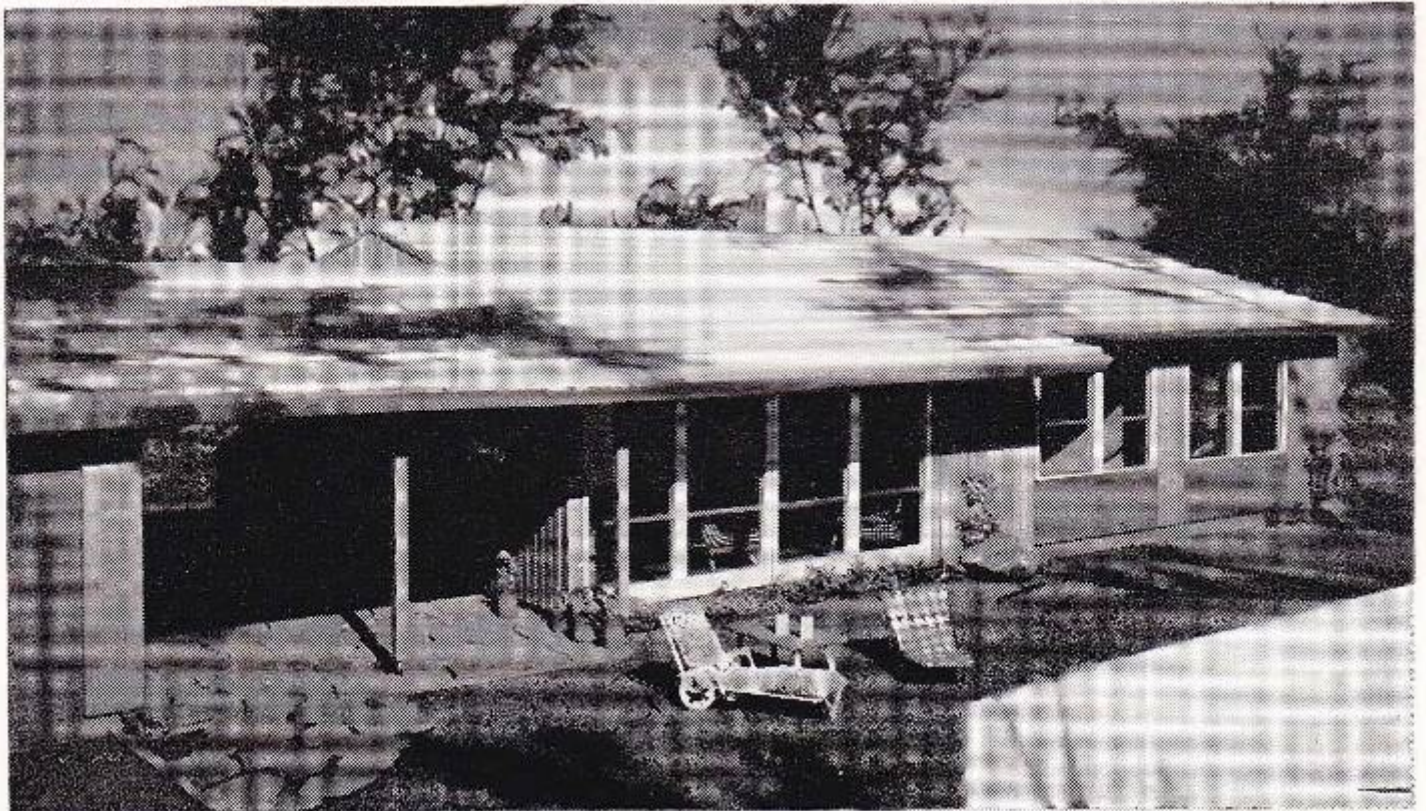
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 8

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

11.0C HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS



Robert D. Harvey Studio

2

Unknown Lustron House designed by Carl Koch and Associates, ca. 1948

Carl Koch worked as a consultant for the struggling Lustron Corporation in 1948, re-envisioning and reinventing their designs. According to this article, Koch designed several new models for the Lustron Company, using more light-weight porcelain-enameled panels. Since it was noted that, due to the closing of the Lustron Corporation in 1950, none of the models Koch designed went into production, this example titled the

“Robert D. Harvey Studio” appears to be a prototype.

From Progressive Architecture, page 108.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 9

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Devon 442 24' x 44' plus 8' x 13' entry; 2208 sq. ft.

Winner of the American Institute of Architects' coveted First Honor Award, this design provides a gracious entry and a free standing fireplace to separate the living and dining areas.

COURTESY OF TECHBUILT, INC. 1100 W. LAMAR ST. CHICAGO, ILL.

Techbuilt model Devon 442

From a Techbuilt promotional booklet which appears ca. late 1950s, the Devon model is here illustrated with photos and floor plans. The caption comments that this 2200-square foot model was awarded the AIA's First Honor Award.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 10

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



**Techbuilt Custom Design in
Cambridge, Mass**

Customized from the Devon 480, this 1900-square foot example highlights the flexibility and customizability of the Techbuilt system. From a ca. late-1950s promotional catalog.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 11

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Techbuilt Vacation Cottage (ca. late-1950s)

Techbuilt houses were also marketed as ideal small, affordable cabins and summer homes. This small example, likely a Montauk, is set into a heavily wooded rustic setting.



**Techbuilt Vacation Cottage
(ca. late-1950s)**

A larger and grander example, this example of a Techbuilt summer home is set in a dramatic, sea-side location.

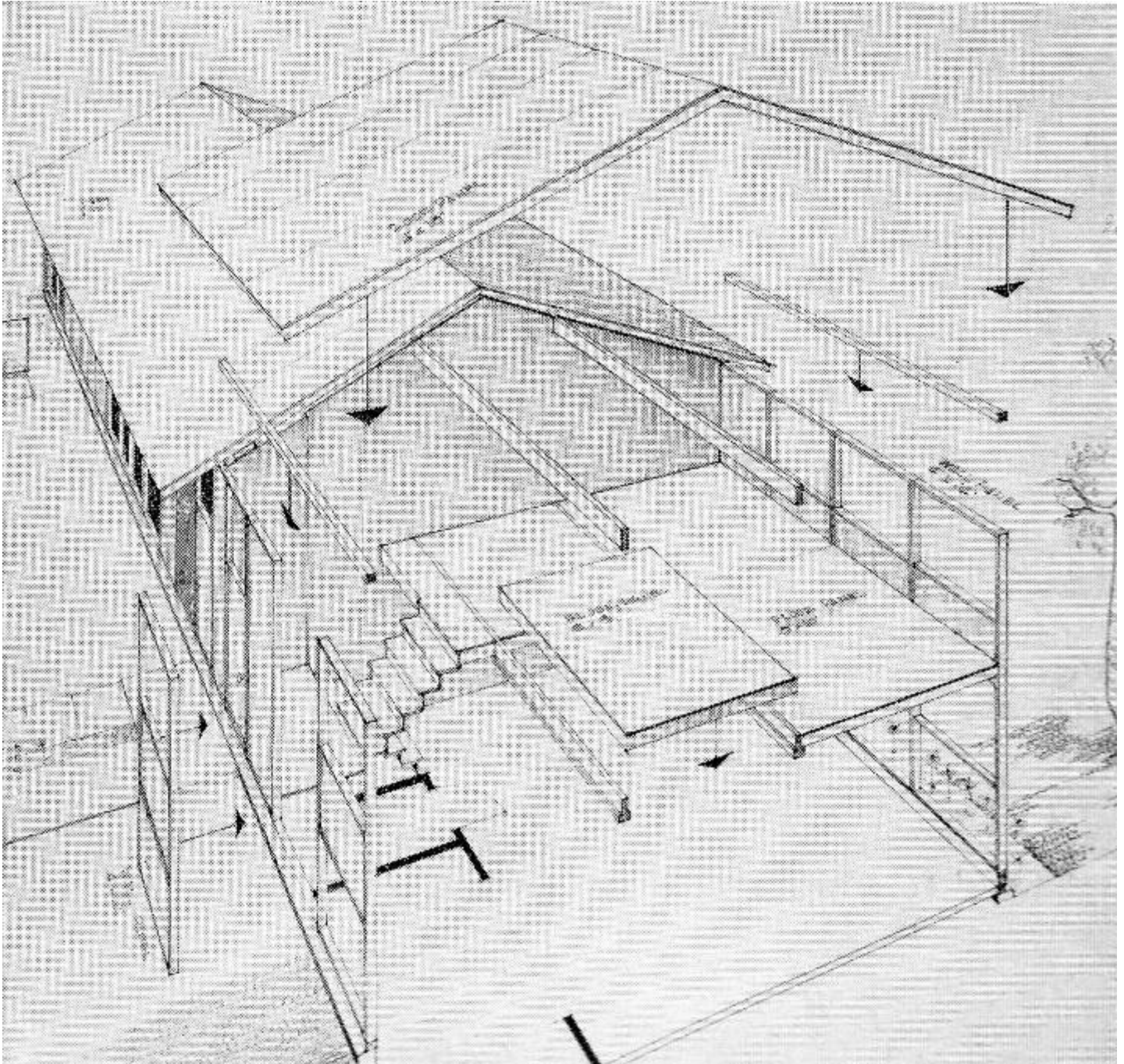
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 12

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Exploded Perspective Drawing of Construction of a Techbuilt House, ca. 1959

This diagram highlights how the various posts and beams, wall panels and floor and roof components were assembled to create the typical Techbuilt house. Note the four-foot modular panel sizes.

From *Progressive Architecture*, page 105

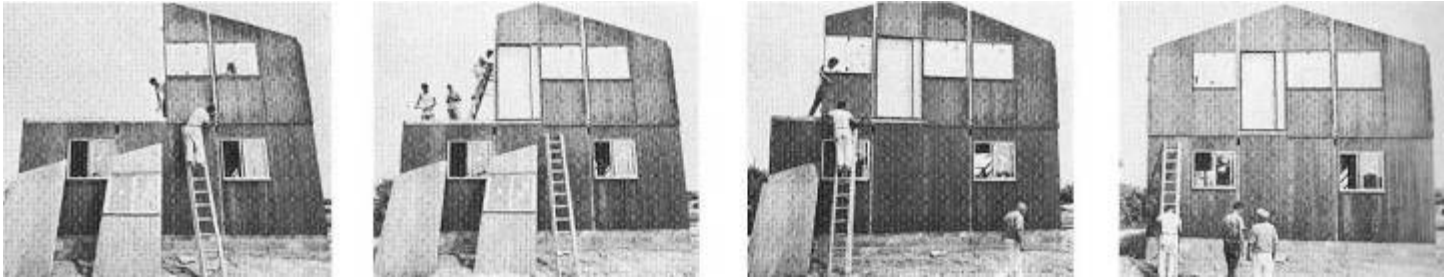
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 13

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Assembling a Techbuilt Beach House (ca. 1960s)

Note how the pre-fabricated panels attach into place with a minimal workforce.

From *Weekend Utopia*, page 122



The freedom house

Freedom from dull conventions. Techbuilt's unreserved design invites a wholly new approach to living. Freedom to express yourself. Techbuilt is the unique pre-built house with custom built flexibility. Exclusive post-and-beam construction and modular walls give you total freedom in planning room arrangements. Freedom from care. Handsome modern materials which require only a minimum of maintenance. Freedom from the squeeze. Generous rooms . . . open spaces . . . floor-to-ceiling glass walls . . . bedrooms plus . . . Techbuilt wins the space race. More than a score of contemporary Techbuilt designs.

Send for fascinating photo and fact-filled guide book of prize-winning vacation and year-'round homes. ONLY \$1.00

TECHBUILT
585 State Road, Dept. NY511
North Dartmouth, Mass. 02747
I enclose \$1.00 for your guide book to vacation and year 'round homes.
I own a homesite Yes No
Location _____
Name _____
Street _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____



**"The Freedom House"
Techbuilt Advertisement**

An advertisement from New York Magazine, May 11, 1970, described the philosophy of the Techbuilt house, notably here its use as beach houses. Note that for \$1.00, customers could send away for a catalog.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 14

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



The Staff of Robert Traynham Coles, Architect, PC
Then located at 1151 Main Street, Buffalo
Coles is sixth from the right in the mid-ground.
(1970-1975)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 15

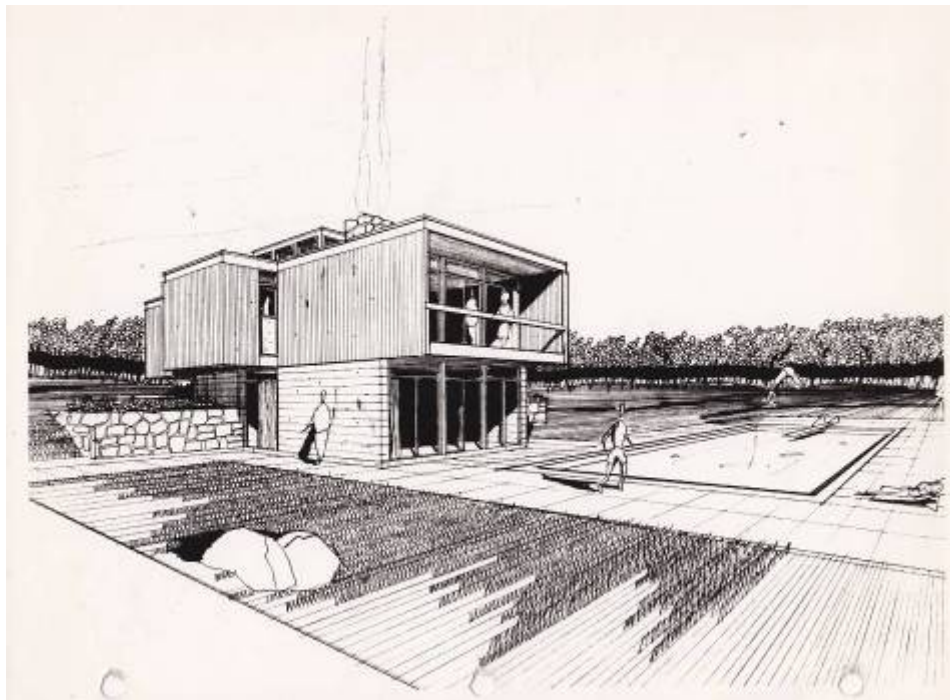
**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



**Robert Traynham Coles, with image of UB's Alumni Arena under construction
(ca. 1982-85)**

Courtesy of Western New York Heritage Magazine



**Perspective Sketch, Weekend House for Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Ravin, Ellicottville, NY
(1970)**

Provided by R.T. Coles

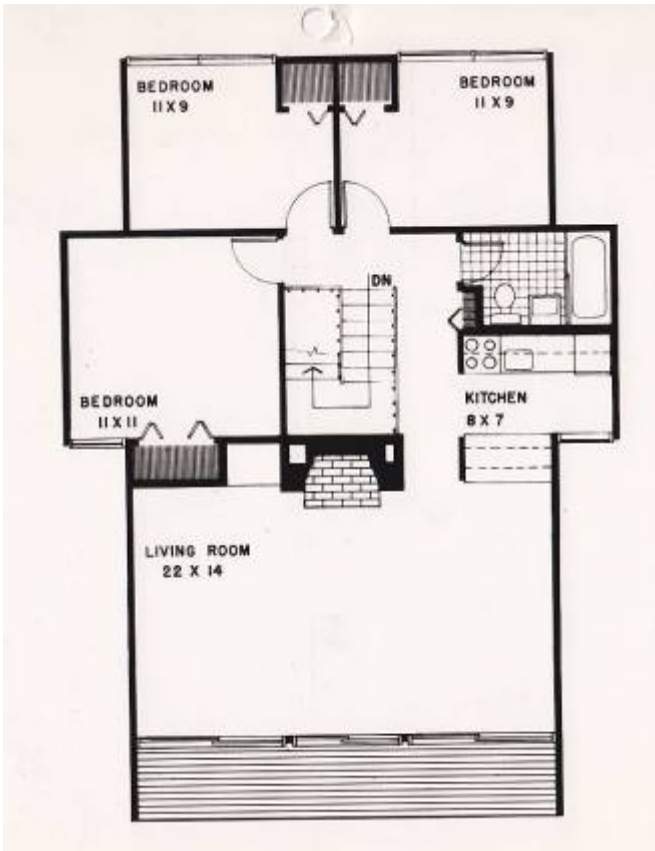
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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

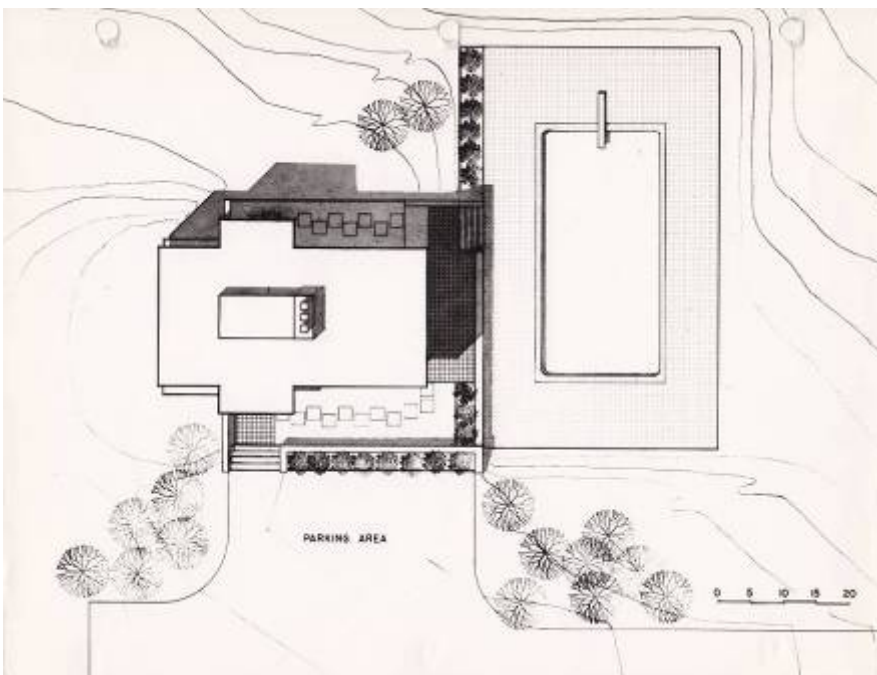
Section 11 Page 16

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



**Second Floor Plan, Weekend House for Dr. and Mrs.
Joseph Ravin, Ellicottville, NY
(1970)**
Provided by R.T. Coles



**Site Plan, Weekend House for Dr.
and Mrs. Joseph Ravin, Ellicottville,
NY
(1970)**
Provided by R.T. Coles

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 17

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



**Robert Traynham
Coles House and
Studio**
North elevation
from Humboldt
Pkwy
(ca. 1961)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 18

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and Studio
North elevation from sidewalk (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 19

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and Studio
South elevation (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 20

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and Studio
South elevation and rear court, showing landscaping (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 21

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and Studio
Interior, Living Room (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 22

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and Studio
Interior, Living Room (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 23

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and Studio
Interior, Living Room (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 24

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and Studio
Interior, Master Bedroom (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 25

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and Studio
Interior, Kitchen (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 26

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and Studio
Interior, Kitchen looking into Dining Area (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 27

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and Studio

Interior, Kitchen/ Dining Area looking out onto sunken patio and rear court (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 28

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



Robert T. Coles House and Studio
Interior, Main Staircase (ca. 1963)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 29

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 30

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 31

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 32

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 33

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 34

**ROBERT T. COLES
HOUSE AND STUDIO**

Name of Property
ERIE, NEW YORK
County and State

