

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 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 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 **Baltimore, Jesse R., House**
other names/site number _____

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number **5136 Sherier Place NW** not for publication **N/A**
city or town **Washington** vicinity **N/A**
state **District of Columbia** code ____ county **N/A** code **N/A**
zip code **20016**

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3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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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 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 Date

State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (_____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau

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4. National Park Service Certification
=====

I, hereby certify that this property is:

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

Signature of Keeper _____ Date _____
of Action

=====
5. Classification
=====

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- _____ private
- public-local
- _____ public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u> 1 </u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
_____	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

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

N/A

=====
6. Function or Use
=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic

Sub: Single dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Vacant-not currently inhabited

Sub: _____

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7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and early 20th century American movements
(American Foursquare Catalog Kit House)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete block
roof asphalt shingle
walls Wood (clapboard) with wooden shingle on dormer

other Granite steps with stone tops

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

=====
8. Statement of Significance
=====

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form

Baltimore, Jesse R., House
Washington, DC

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.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a 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
Community Planning and Development
Transportation
Other: Construction (kit house)

Period of Significance 1925-1959

Significant Dates 1893-trolley line opens
1925-house constructed
1959-house passes out of private ownership

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

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Architect/Builder Sears, Roebuck & Company - Architect
Jesse R. Baltimore, Sr. and
George Lewis Baltimore Builders

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one

or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS) **N/A**

___ 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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

___ State Historic Preservation Office

___ Other State agency

___ Federal agency

___ Local government

___ University

___ Other

Name of repository: _____

=====
10. Geographical Data
=====

Acreage of Property **less than one acre (approximately 5,600 square feet)**

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	___	_____	_____	3	___	_____
2	___	_____	_____	4	___	_____
	___	See continuation sheet.				

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

Lot 826 in Square 1415. [Originally was Lot 68 in Square 1415].

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

This is the identification information recorded in District of Columbia tax records.

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USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form

Baltimore, Jesse R., House

Washington, DC

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11. Form Prepared By

=====
name/title **Douglas P. Sefton and Mary E. Rowse, President**

organization **Historic Washington Architecture, Inc.** date **March 21, 2004**

street & number **3706 Morrison Street NW** telephone **202-362-9279/703-836-2015**

city or town **Washington, D.C.** zip code **20015-1734**

=====
Additional Documentation
=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage
or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

=====
Property Owner
=====

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

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

=====
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for
applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties
for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to
amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a
benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended
(16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a
person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it
displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated
to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Keeper, National Register of Historic Places, 1849 "C" Street NW,
Washington, DC 20240.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 7

**name of property: Baltimore, Jesse R., House
county and State: Washington, DC**

DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

310.22 If property is proposed for designation principally for its architectural significance, a detailed architectural description of the property, including, where possible, its original and present appearance.

Site

The Jesse Baltimore house, a Sears, Roebuck & Company "Fullerton" model, at 5136 Sherier Place, N.W., occupies Lot 826, Square 1415 in the Palisades neighborhood of northwest Washington, D.C., near MacArthur Boulevard and the Maryland-District of Columbia line. The surrounding residential houses set along tree-lined streets, are a mixture of larger and smaller detached houses. These houses predominantly date from the early twentieth century but the neighborhood includes houses built to approximate traditional styles in recent years.

The Jesse Baltimore house faces northeast on a lot 50 feet wide by 112 feet deep (5,624 square feet) at the corner of Sherier Place and the entrance to the Palisades Recreation Center. The lot is level and is surrounded on four sides by a chain link fence that has been in place since at least the 1950s. There is an oak tree on the south side of the house which was planted by its owner-builder, Jesse R. Baltimore, in the late 1920s or early 1930s. Near the east front corner of the house is a small rock-lined circular pool constructed by the builder of the house for both goldfish and his family's small flock of ducks.¹

There is an entrance road to the Palisades Recreation Center on the north side of the property line, which leads to a parking lot behind the house. The former trolley right-of-way runs through the parking lot behind the rear property line.

There are three lots (Nos. 36, 37 and 38 in Square 1415) totaling 8,300.25 square feet to the south of the house through which an underground stream flows into a culvert. The Baltimore family reluctantly sold this vacant land to the U. S. Government on February 18, 1938.² The Government apparently acquired the land "for the purpose of a highway plan street" but abandoned the idea on June 16, 1959, after the house and its 5,624 square foot lot had been purchased from the Baltimore family on February 14, 1959.³ The combined square footage of these four lots is 13,924 although DC tax records cite a combined size of 19,621 square feet for 5136 Sherier Place. The missing square footage may come from Lots 41 and 42 upon which a road into Palisades Recreation Center now exits today. There are no other buildings on any of the lots.

Dwelling

Built between July and October of 1925, the Jesse Baltimore house achieves its prominence by being the only positively-identified example of a fully-intact Sears, Roebuck & Company "Fullerton" in the Palisades community. The structure itself is 24 feet wide by 26 feet deep and has a full-width front porch that is an additional 8 feet deep.

The house was constructed by a member of the first and only family to own and occupy it--Jesse Robert Baltimore, with the help of his brother George Lewis Baltimore. It took the men just about 90 days to build the house, the

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standard amount of time Sears advertised as needed for constructing such a home.⁴ It is a fine original example of a Foursquare, pre-cut, "Honor-Bilt" mail-order catalogue house built in the mid-1920s, during the heyday of catalogue house construction in the Palisades and in the city of Washington.

"The Fullerton" is one of Sears' larger Foursquare designs with more front windows, bigger rooms and a fireplace in the living room than its more spartan cousins. There are seven windows in the front of the house; a triple unit on the first floor and two pairs of double windows on the second. The windows are wood, double-hung, typically 8 lights over 1. (See Illustration 1 for a full-scale view of the Jesse Baltimore House and Illustration 2 for a side-by-side comparison of the Modern Homes Catalog Fullerton illustration and the Baltimore House.)

The two small and one large single windows on the "kitchen side" of the Fullerton catalog illustration are found on the northwest side of the Baltimore House⁵. This face of the house shows an interesting customization of the Sears plan apparently performed at the time of construction. In the Modern Homes Catalog floor plan, the bathroom is illuminated by a single window in the upper story rear of the house. In the Baltimore House, this window has been relocated to the rear quadrant of the southwest side. Mr. Baltimore's son believes that his father, a plumber, likely altered the plan to accommodate a preferred arrangement of the bathroom fixtures.⁶ Such adaptations were encouraged by Sears, which advertised a "Complete Architectural Service" to provide "the best advice and technical help...to help you build your home as you want it."⁷

The two single upper story windows, single living room, and double dining room windows in the Fullerton floor plan are found on the south side of the Baltimore House. The attic is lit by a single window in a broad hip-roofed dormer on the front of the house. Although some of these windows are covered with plywood, the original sashes are thought to be in place, in keeping with the exposed windows in the house.

The front stoop and porch foundation piers are brick masonry in the catalog illustration, but are rough-finished, stone-like concrete block in the Baltimore House. The front stoop of concrete block and stone steps, are topped with stone slabs, possibly of granite. Because masonry materials were not shipped with Sears house parts even though they were shown in the catalog and listed in the specifications, a homeowner was free to make his own choice about which materials to use⁸. The Baltimore House has a center chimney built of brick and a foundation of smooth finished block, like the catalog illustration.

The Baltimore House is finished with wood lap siding with a narrow exposure, identical to that in the Modern Homes Catalog Fullerton illustration. The sides and face of the Baltimore House's dormer are wood-shingled, as in the catalog illustration. The house has a shingle hip roof, with broad overhanging eaves on all four sides. The single story, front porch hip roof is supported by two square wood columns at the outside corners. These square paneled columns are mounted on concrete block battered piers. Their exposed sides have ornamental scalloped depressions, as do the pillars. A wood picket railing which appears to be original, encloses three sides of the porch.

A side entry door on the northwest side of the house leads to a landing inside that goes off to the left for the basement and off to the right for the kitchen. As in the Fullerton floor plan, there is no rear entrance at ground level.

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Alterations

There is a two-story, almost free-standing, metal fire escape attached to the rear of the house that was added when it served as a group home. At the top landing of the fire escape, a rear bedroom window has been converted to a door and the rear dining room window is covered by a clapboard patch. There are light duty metal railings on the front stoop. A small, very simple platform-like concrete porch with metal railings stands in front of the side entrance.

Integrity

The Baltimore House is a fine example of a Sears Fullerton with highly intact stylistic hallmarks and detailing, down to original 3-pane dormer window, porch railing, and wood siding. It is rare to find a home of this age without jarring stylistic updates or additions tacked onto it. This is in part because the same family that built the house in 1925 lived in it for 33 years until it was sold to the federal government. Later inhabitants were temporary residents with no financial stake in modifying it. The few additions that were made, such as the fire escape and platform side porch, do not involve major compromises to the original structure or historic fabric of the house and are easily reversible.

Although the Baltimore House badly needs cosmetic enhancements like a fresh coat of paint, it appears in sound exterior and structural shape. This is a testimony both to the Baltimore Brother's construction skills and Sears' excellent materials. As Sears historian Rosemary Thornton has written:

Sears lumber was "first growth lumber...wood which grew slowly in natural forests. The slower wood grows, the denser the grain...the stronger the wood...and the more resistant it is to decay and rot." Sears boasted..."We do not handle hemlock, spruce or inferior types of lumber. The lumber we furnish is fine, dry yellow pine, the strongest lumber for framing. Cypress for outside finish, [cypress] the wood that lasts for centuries; and oak, birch or yellow pine, as specified for interior finish."⁹

Footnotes

- 1) Conversation with Mr. John Z. Baltimore, Herndon, VA, March 1, 2004
- 2) Land Transfer Order No. 439 dated March 10, 1938 on file with National Capital Region, National Parks Service.
- 3) Land Record No. 356 dated October 25, 1960 on file with National Capital Region, National Parks Service.
- 4) Thornton, Rosemary. The Houses That Sears Built. Gentle Beam Publications, Alton, IL (2002) p. 13.
- 5) All References to the Modern Homes Catalog illustration and floor plan refer to The Sears, Roebuck Catalog of Houses, 1926. Reprinted By Dover Press, New York, NY. (1991) p. 68-69.
- 6) Conversation with Mr. John Z. Baltimore, Herndon, VA, March 1, 2004
- 7) Thornton, p. 67.
- 8) The Sears, Roebuck Catalog of Houses, 1926 p. 68.
- 9) 1922 Sears Modern Homes Catalog, quoted in Thornton, p. 15.

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name of property: **Baltimore, Jesse R., House**
county and State: **Washington, DC**

Summary Statement of Significance:

The Jesse Baltimore House at 5136 Sherier Place NW is the Palisades' only positively-identified Sears Roebuck "Fullerton" kit house with virtually intact original exterior features. Kit houses marketed by Sears, Roebuck & Company and other manufacturers played a historically-significant role in the development of the Palisades, an early 20th century streetcar suburb within the Washington, DC city limits, because of their affordability, quality of design and materials and ease of construction. They provided an important avenue for Washington's working and middle class families to become homeowners during the years between the World Wars.

Resource History and Historic Context:

"The Palisades" takes its name from the cliffs that overlook the Canal and Potomac River just northwest of Georgetown. The Palisades' riverside location and elevation made it an ideal site for Washington, DC's original main reservoir system just after the Civil War.

The Palisades was long a rural enclave within the city limits, a pathway between the wharves and warehouses of Georgetown, the farmlands of Montgomery County, and points further west. Traffic and transients moved through the Palisades along the C&O Canal, or by way of Canal and Conduit Roads, which also carried produce from the Palisades' farms to the municipal markets and street corners throughout Georgetown and Washington. Taverns and saloons sprang along these roads and the slow-moving agricultural traffic created landmarks of its own, such as "Drover's Rest", a patch of cleared land between Conduit Road (the current MacArthur Boulevard) and Reservoir Road that became the site of holding pens.¹ Conduit Road, along which ran the city's major water supply main, was macadamized at a time when most downtown streets were still cobblestone and outlying streets unpaved. It became a speedway for carriage racing as well as for the "wheelmen" of the 1890s bicycling craze, and gained notoriety as a weekend speed trap long before automobiles were common.² The Palisades also attracted wealthier residents who built summer and week-end cottages to enjoy cool country air. To entertain late nineteenth century tourists, a hotel and gambling casino opened on the grounds of the Dalecarlia Reservoir.

Planning for an "electric railway" between Georgetown and Great Falls began in the 1880s. In 1893, the Washington-Great Falls Electric Railroad, which ran parallel to Conduit Road, connected the new Glen Echo Chautauqua Resort to the city and made the Palisades less than 30 minute's trip from the Treasury Department. Rapid transportation almost immediately began to transform the Palisades from an area of farms and rustic retreats into a suburb within the city limits. Even while the railway was still under construction, a syndicate led by E.B. Cottrell invested the magnificent sum of \$350,000, and began selling building lots in "Palisades of the Potomac, a 400 acre subdivision near the reservoir."³ This transformation from rustic settlement occurred during what the National Register has termed the "Streetcar Suburb" period between 1888 and 1928.⁴

During the nineteenth Century, Mike and John Sherier, their families, and descendants farmed on lands later divided by a lane called Sherier Place NW. Sherier Place, which runs between Conduit Road on the north and Canal Road on the south, closely followed the electric railway track bed. As the tracks ran north from Georgetown, they passed

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immediately behind the houses on the south side of Sherier Place. Near the intersection of Galena Place, the tracks shifted slightly northward and continued toward Glen Echo along the median in the center of Sherier Place.

Sherier Place developed somewhat later than the neighborhoods north of Conduit Road. In 1915, it had just three houses. As development extended the street, it had 37 houses by 1920, 48 houses by 1921, 55 houses by 1923, and 70 houses by 1925.⁵ This growth reflects the development pattern described in the National Register's publication "Historic Residential Suburbs:

Unlike railroad suburbs which grew in nodes around stations, streetcar suburbs formed continuous corridors. Because the streetcar made numerous stops at short intervals, developers platted rectilinear subdivisions...generally on small lots.⁶

This period of development closely paralleled the peak period of kit house building in Washington, DC.

Although kit houses were sold by companies including Aladdin, Lewis, Sterling, Gordon-Van Tine, and Montgomery Ward, Sears Roebuck is generally credited with manufacturing the largest number. The company had an advantage over the others, because in 1908 when Sears issued its 44-page first Modern Homes Catalog, one out of every four Americans was already looking through a Sears general merchandise catalog.

By 1918, the Modern Homes catalog had expanded to 146 pages and included models from two room cottages priced at less than \$1,000 to the mansion-like \$5,972 Magnolia. Styles included bungalows, four-squares, cottages, colonials, and farmhouses in wood, brick, or concrete block. But Sears did not stop at making "ordering a home as easy as ordering an automobile, radio or piece of furniture". In 1919, Sears established a Modern Homes Sales Office in Akron, Ohio. By the end of the 1920s, the number of sales offices had grown to 48.⁷

The Sears Roebuck house era in Washington, DC really began on April 10, 1922. On that day, Sears opened a Modern Homes sales office at 704 Tenth Street NW, which included an actual "small modern house" built within the showroom. The Washington Post opined that the most interesting exhibit was "a small example of Honor-Bilt construction" methods, noting that Sears also offered "a liberal easy payment plan", "money advanced to help finance the building", and mortgages "payable in small monthly installments".⁸

Sears houses had great appeal to middle and working class buyers for many reasons sketched by the Post article.

First, Sears' national buying power and distribution gave purchasers access to top quality materials not necessarily available from local suppliers in that era. As Sears literature boasted, "we buy raw lumber direct from the best timber tracts in America" and "our mills are located right in the heart of the yellow pine districts."⁹

Second, a Sears precut house promised considerable savings in architect fees, material expense, and labor cost. Rosemary Thornton has shown that a typical architect's 5% commission could easily represent six months of a working man's income.¹⁰ In a well-publicized competition, the company claimed that a precut Rodessa bungalow could be erected in 352 carpenter hours, as opposed to 583 carpenter hours using traditional construction methods and

on-site lumber cutting.¹¹ Construction costs could be further reduced by an infusion of the owner's labor, as a Sears house could be erected by anyone with basic construction skills. The company provided a detailed 75-page instruction manual, a full set of plans and blueprints, detailed lists of materials, and stamped identification numbers on most parts. Materials were shipped in highly organized and precisely-timed rail shipments, so that the only transportation a builder needed to arrange was from siding to building site.

Robert Schweitzer and Michael W. R. Davis have stated that Sears houses filled the niche resulting from the fact that "Many ... people already had the land and the craft skills to erect houses, but they lacked the efficiency of lumberyard power tools for cutting and boring, and they also were at the mercy of local lumber dealers or local sawmill prices."¹²

Third, the Sears Modern Homes Catalog offered a full line of houses to suit families of different sizes and different means. Sears offered houses in two grades of framing-Honor Bilt and the cheaper Standard-Bilt, which had more widely-spaced joists and lighter framing. For example, the Fullerton selected by the Baltimores was one of the larger three bedroom Foursquare models. It proved a fortuitous choice when the family had three sons and later raised two granddaughters.

Fourth, Sears offered vastly more liberal financing terms than most lenders of the day. In a time when standard mortgages were subject to renegotiation every three to five years and down payments were typically at least 50% of purchase price, Sears offered 15 year fixed rate loans at up to 75% of value. The value of the lot could be applied to the down payment, as could the value of the owner's construction labor.¹³

A listing for the Palisades neighborhood (Squares 1409 through 1455) shows that, among 90 dwelling permits issued between 1915 and the opening of the Sears Modern Homes Office, no permits cited Sears Roebuck as architect. However, from April 10, 1922, through mid-1928 almost 10% of the 242 of building permits issued for dwellings in these squares listed Sears Roebuck as the architect.¹⁴

This permit listing probably underestimates the actual number of Sears houses in the Palisades, as some permits which did not identify the architect were probably for Sears houses. In addition, the listing does not include permits issued in 1929, the Sears Roebuck Modern Homes Division's greatest year, with sales of more than \$12,000,000. Sears is overwhelmingly the most well-represented kit house manufacturer in the Palisades, although Aladdin Homes is listed as architect on a handful of permits.

The property occupied by the Jesse Baltimore House was originally the site of a one-story 20 by 17 foot frame house whose address was "5138 Sherier Place". In 1921, W.T. Wilverton applied for a permit to add a single shed room to this house, which he stated had been occupied before the law requiring an occupancy permit had been passed.¹⁵ By 1923, this property had become the residence of Jesse Robert Baltimore.

Mr. Baltimore was born near Charlottesville, Virginia in 1890 and came to Washington in 1915. For his first seven years in the city, Mr. Baltimore appears to have led the nomadic existence of even a skilled blue-collar tradesman and renter. After renting accommodations at 1004 C Street SW while working as a mechanic, he had moved to 427 G Street NW and begun working as a plumber by 1917. 1920 found Mr. Baltimore, who served in the Army Tank Corps

during World War I, working as a mechanic and living at 29 N Street SE. In 1921, while working as a plumber for the W.H. Mooney Company of 726 Eleventh Street NW, Mr. Baltimore resided at 737 Seventh Street SE. In 1922 he moved to 509 H Street NW and, in 1923, to 5136 Sherier Place NW.¹⁶

It is unclear whether Mr. Baltimore modified the original house on his property or razed and rebuilt it. However, during his first two years on Sherier Place, he and his wife lived in a small frame building at the rear of the lot. On September 24, 1924, he obtained a permit to build a dwelling designed by architect L.T. Burn. However, District inspectors visited the site week after week and reported work “not started”.¹⁷ Then, on July 7, 1925, Mr. Baltimore obtained another building permit, this time for a house whose architect was listed as “Sears Roebuck”.¹⁸

The model Mr. Baltimore selected was the \$2,300 “Fullerton”, an “Honor-Bilt” (Sears’ highest quality) house offering 1,932 square feet of living space in a six room, two-story, American Foursquare design. Alan Gowans has called the foursquare “a Georgian mansion reborn in middle-class form”.¹⁹ Schweitzer and Davis could have been describing Mr. Baltimore’s house and lot when they wrote:

As the quintessential home of the period, a form seen from coast to coast, from plain to fancy, [the Foursquare] really could--and perhaps should--be called 'National,' the true nationwide house...

The National Period was an era of narrow, deep lots to pack houses close to the streetcar lines. Houses typically presented large front porches with overhanging eaves. Shapes generally were blockish, more vertical than horizontal, narrow rather than wide. Surface materials were predominantly still clapboard...²⁰

Sears tellingly advertised the Fullerton as “adapt[ing] itself equally well to city lots or country estates”²¹, making it an especially appropriate match to the village-within-the-city character of the Palisades.

Although no reliable statistics exist regarding the number of houses of each model Sears sold, the number of years each model was included in the catalog is an index of its popularity. Five Sears Roebuck Modern Homes catalogs featured the Fullerton between 1925 and 1933. Although numerous models were featured for only one or two years, the Fullerton’s five year run does not compare to those of such common Sears models as the Vallonia bungalow (twelve years) or Whitehall Foursquare (nine years).²² Sears advertisements in The Washington Post are illustrated such designs as The Langston and The Puritan. None of the ads show the Fullerton, which was somewhat pricier than average and therefore possibly less common than other models.

Construction on 5136 proceeded swiftly, with Jesse Baltimore and his brother George Lewis Baltimore having the house ready for occupancy in October 1925. This was in keeping with the ninety-day time frame Sears advertised for constructing its “already-cut and fitted” homes. Mr. Baltimore’s son John recalls that his father and uncle completed most of the construction themselves, but contracted out the building of the front stoop and porch pillar piers. Because Sears did not supply masonry with its house kits, these were built of concrete block and stone by a mason.²³

Mr. Baltimore built the Fullerton as a home for his family, which by 1930 included his wife Mary Gladys (born in Washington, DC in 1898), their son Jesse Robert, Jr. (born 1927), and Mr. Baltimore’s mother Martha (born in

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Virginia in 1854).²⁴ Two other sons, George Lewis and John Zachariah were born in 1931 and 1935 respectively. Another child, Mary, born after George, died in infancy²⁵.

For more than 30 years after building his home, Jesse Baltimore worked in the plumbing trade, which he passed on to his sons Jesse and John. In 1930, he was a plumber at a private school, while in 1940, he was employed by McCarthy and Son Plumbers. Until shortly before World War II, Mr. Baltimore did not own a car. His son recalls that he commuted to job sites all over the city by carrying his plumbing tools and lunchbox out to Trolley Stop 15, which was almost directly behind the house. This was true of many other men in the neighborhood who worked in the building trades.

The Baltimore family lived at 5136 Sherier Place NW until 1958. In November of that year, the Washington Post advertised the house for sale at \$ 18,500. [Interestingly, the 2003 property tax valuation exceeds \$500,000.] Jesse and Mary Baltimore retired to Mechanicsville, Maryland, where Jesse died on December 12, 1959. Mary, who was generally called by her middle name, survived until 1982.

In 1938, the National Park Service had purchased the empty lot to the south of the house from the Baltimores.²⁶ According to Mr. Baltimore's son, his parents were in the process of selling 5136 Sherier Place to a private party in 1958 when the National Parks Service announced that it also intended to acquire the house and lot. This purchase was completed on February 14, 1959²⁷ and the Washington City Directory for 1959 listed 5136 Sherier Place as vacant. In 1960, the house disappeared from the city tax assessment records. On June 16, 1971, the National Park Service transferred jurisdiction of the house to the District of Columbia Parks and Recreation Department along with the adjoining Palisades Recreation Center.

For much of the first 15 years after it passed from private hands, 5136 Sherier Place was occupied by renters. City records indicate that it was used as a "halfway house" in 1975 and that in 1981 it was leased to a group home operator by the DC Department of Human Services. Although it does not appear seriously deteriorated, the house has stood vacant for more than a decade.

The Jesse Baltimore House has manifold significance. It is both unique and an outstanding example of a house type that exemplifies its historic context.

First, kit houses, and especially those manufactured by Sears Roebuck, played an important role in the development of the Palisades. Because such families in the 1920s and 1930s often could not afford a house and a car, the conjunction of the kit house construction economies and proximity to the streetcar made ownership of a suburban-style detached home a possibility for them. They were thus an important avenue for working and middle class families to become homeowners in the District of Columbia. The history of this specific house, as traced through the recollections and photographs retained by the Baltimore family, exemplifies this pattern through the experience of an individual family whose primary wage-earner migrated from the rural south for the expanding economy of World War I era Washington, DC. Jesse Robert Baltimore was in many ways the prototype of the Modern Homes customer, a man with building skills who wanted the best possible home for his family.

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Second, the Jesse Baltimore House exemplifies Sears kit houses because it exhibits so many intact original Sears details; the original narrow-width frame siding, which Sears advertised as being made of cypress, “the wood eternal”, the shingled third floor dormer with three vertical dividers, the original sashes and fenestration pattern, the porch railing and millwork, the center chimney, hipped upper, gable, and porch roofs and other details.

Third, the Jesse Baltimore is a regrettably unique example of its type. Although a wide variety of Sears models were built within the Palisades, a check of permit addresses and a detailed windshield survey of the neighborhood (which identified additional Sears Roebuck kit houses) discloses that more than two-thirds of the Sears houses have vanished entirely or been significantly altered, many to the point of being unrecognizable as Sears designs of any type. The Jesse Baltimore House is the only intact Sears Fullerton identified in the Palisades. One other Fullerton has been tentatively identified in the Palisades, but it has been extensively remodeled and lacks many hallmark features, including the center chimney and front dormer. It is not an intact example like the Jesse Baltimore House.

The Jesse Baltimore House, the only intact Sears Fullerton identified in the Palisades, is eligible for landmark status under National Register criteria A and C.

Footnotes

- 1) Washington Post, January 8, 1890, p. 2.
- 2) Washington Post, August 17, 1897, p.2
- 3) Washington Post, October 20, 1890, p. 2.
- 4) National Register Bulletin. Historic Residential Suburbs. National Park Service. Washington, DC (2002) p. 16.
- 5) Data tabulated from annual Washington, DC City Directories, 1915-1925.
- 6) Historic Residential Suburbs. p. 20.
- 7) Thornton, Rosemary. The Houses That Sears Built. Gentle Beam Publications, Alton, IL (2002) p.33-34.
- 8) Washington Post, April 9, 1922, p. 45.
- 9) Thornton. p. 26.
- 10) From Clark, Clifford. The American Family Home 1800-1960. Quoted in Thornton, p. 19.
- 11) Thornton, p. 7.

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- 12) Schweitzer, Robert and Davis, Michael. America's Favorite Homes. Wayne State University Press. Detroit, MI (1990). p. 62.
- 13) Thornton, p. 97-98.
- 14) Data from computer listing provided by District of Columbia Historic Preservation Office, February, 2004.
- 15) Washington, DC Building Permit 1839, September 3, 1921.
- 16) Washington, DC City Directory listings, 1915-1923.
- 17) Washington, DC Building Permit 3010, September 24, 1924 and subsequent weekly inspection reports
- 18) Washington, DC Building Permit 191, July 7, 1925.
- 19) Alan Gowans. The Comfortable House, p.87 [quoted Schweitzer and Davis. p. 165].
- 20) Schweitzer and Davis. p.168.
- 21) The Sears, Roebuck Catalog of Houses, 1926. Reprinted By Dover Press, New York, NY. (1991) p. 68-69.
- 22) Jandl, H. Ward and Stevenson, Katherine C. Houses By Mail. National Trust For Historic Preservation. Washington, DC (1986)
- 23) Conversation with Mr. John Z. Baltimore, Herndon, VA, March 1, 2004
- 24) 1930 Census Record for the Baltimore Family
- 25) Telephone conversation with Ms. Linda Tracy, Orange, VA, March 8, 2004
- 26) Land Transfer Order No. 439 dated March 10, 1938 on file with National Capital Region, National Parks Service.
- 27) Land Record No. 356 dated October 25, 1960 on file with National Capital Region, National Parks Service.

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