

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

FILE COPY

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 Coams, Norris and Harriet, Lustron House

other names/site number Coams-Morrow House, 127-108-09046

2. Location

street & number 411 Bowser Avenue N/A not for publication

city or town Chesterton NA vicinity

state Indiana code IN county Porter code 127 zip code 46304

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 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.)

Patrick L. Rabston 7-20-92
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Indiana Department of Natural Resources
State of 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:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:) _____ _____ _____	_____	_____

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
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	0	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Ranch

OTHER: Lustron

MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls METAL: Steel

METAL: Aluminum

roof METAL: Steel

other

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1950

Significant Dates

1950

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

NA

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Strandlund, Carl/Lustron

Corporation; Tonn and Blank

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 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:

Ohio Historical Society, Collection MSS861

Coombs-Lustron House
Name of Property

Porter County, IN
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	6	4	9	5	3	9	0	4	6	0	6	0	8	0
Zone		Easting					Northing							

2

Zone		Easting					Northing							

3

Zone		Easting					Northing							

4

Zone		Easting					Northing							

See continuation sheet

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 Beverly Overmyer

organization _____ date April, 1992

street & number 641A West 100 North telephone 219/759-4956

city or town Valparaiso state IN zip code 46383

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name James P. Morrow

street & number P.O. Box 508 telephone _____

city or town Chesterton state IN zip code 46304

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, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1

Coombs Lustron House
Porter County, Indiana

Completed in the spring of 1950, the dwelling at 411 Bowser Avenue in Chesterton, Indiana, is one of the last manufactured and erected Lustron homes (#2329) of approximately 2500 sold and produced by the Lustron Corporation. Yet, today, it still retains its complete structural and architectural integrity in an unaltered manner.

The Coombs Lustron house with its Lustron two-car detached garage is in a residential subdivision including homes built prior to WWI. The house is visible from both street and alley. It is three blocks from a major state highway which leads to the Indiana Dunes State Park and Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Park, just two miles to the north. Also, it is only two blocks from the Old Chesterton Cemetery.

The Coombs Lustron house, which is considered a one-story ranch style design, has no basement, but is erected on a concrete slab. It contains three bedrooms (unlike the majority erected which have two bedrooms) with living room, dining area, kitchen, utility and bathroom totaling 1200 square feet of living space.

411 Bowser is also one of few Lustron houses with a Lustron two-car garage. As identified previously, the entire exterior of the Lustron house and garage are covered with procelain enameled steel panels. This applies to the roof shingles, roof overhang materials (including gutters and downspouts), gable ends and exterior wall coverings. The exterior wall panels are two-foot square. The steel exterior doors are likewise finished in the same manner with glass panel inserts. The stationary and casement windows are aluminum framed.

The house is a one story, side gabled building. The roof overhangs at the front and rear but is nearly flush at the gable ends. The south elevation faces Bowser Avenue (photo 1). It has two picture window groups, each consisting of four-light casements flanking a fixed picture window. The picture window group to the west is in a slightly projecting bay. To the far right (east) is a pair of small casements.

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Coombs Lustron House
Porter County, Indiana

The west elevation has the primary entry sheltered under an aluminum awning. North of this is a picture window grouping.

The east elevation has two pairs of symmetrically placed casement windows.

The north wall has a picture window group to the far left (east), a single casement, a door, and another pair of casement windows.

The garage is also a simple gable roofed building. The north wall has two overhead vehicle doors, while the east wall has a door and horizontal window (photo 2). The other sides are devoid of openings.

The interior of the house has basically two areas. Referring to photo 1, the left half of the house contains the public areas: living room/dining room, kitchen, and utility room. To the right are three bedrooms accessed from a narrow hall. The interior of the home is also covered with porcelain enameled steel panels of various sizes and designs. Most interior wall coverings are floor-to-ceiling two-foot by eight-foot panels with vertically scored lines. Ceiling panels measure four feet by four feet.

Panels in the kitchen, utility room and bathroom are two-foot square. The interior enamel color is primarily of "battleship gray." It should be noted that in the construction of the house no wood or other combustible materials are used--no wood window trim, door trim or base trim. In fact, no interior trim material of any kind is used. Since there are no load-bearing partitions (room dividers) in the dwelling, it was easy for Lustron to provide steel wall furniture and enclosed closet space throughout as built-in features. Between the dining area and kitchen is a buffet with shelves and drawers on one side and kitchen cabinets with shelves and drawers on the other side, all finished in porcelain enameled steel (photos 4 and 5). To assist in food serving, a counter pass-through is placed in this unit.

This furniture unit is highlighted with sculptured horizontal and vertical lines and recessed door and drawer pulls. It conveys a strong art deco influence. The porcelain enameled steel furniture

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Coams Lustron House
Porter County, Indiana

unit between the living room and adjoining bedroom contains a mirrored bookcase on one side and a mirrored vanity and counter top with drawers and doors for closet space on the other side, again, with a sculptured look (photos 6 and 7).

All wall corners are rounded--inside and out. This is all part of the "streamlined" look with clean, uncluttered lines and a lack of ornamentation.

All bedrooms and bathroom have steel porcelain enameled flush doors which slide and roll on overhead tracks into pockets in the wall. There is no protruding hardware on these doors. All closet doors are of the bypass sliding type (photo 8). The utility room is a good example of this "clean" modern look with flush-mounted removable panels which conceal the electrical circuit breaker box, phone service box and the plumbing hook-ups for water and waste (photo 10). The utility room is as attractive as other rooms.

The mechanical systems are in good working condition. The 60-amp electrical circuit breaker box has been updated to a 100-amp service with additional circuits. However, the armored cable electrical service (BX) remains undisturbed. All the ceiling and wall electrical fixtures are the originals.

The plumbing service operates in a satisfactory manner. The bathroom stool and wash basin, which were replaced by the previous owner, have been removed and the current owner has installed plumbing fixtures which nearly duplicate the originals. The original steel bathtub and shower are in daily use. Lustron was so efficient in the production of the stamped steel bathtub that major plumbing fixture manufacturers and suppliers negotiated to purchase this bathtub. The previous owner replaced the original oil furnace with a gas unit as well as the water heater. The forced air heating system is another outstanding engineering marvel. No heat registers exist for the flow of air into the rooms. As a result, this is a no-draft system. The hot air flow from the furnace passes through a duct system into the attic area directly above the steel ceiling panels. In turn, the hot air heats the ceiling panels which radiate the heat into the interior of the house. It is a very even, smooth, comfortable heating

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Coombs Lustron House
Porter County, Indiana

system. The utility room contains the proper hookups for both clothes washer and dryer, all concealed behind removable panels.

The original kitchen base steel unit which contained a single bowl sink, counter top and top-loading combination dishwasher/clothes washer was removed (The dish/clothes washer was a typical item to Lustron homes, and was advertised as a modern space-saving device). The current owner obtained another washer, which has been rehabilitated to a like-new appearance. The Lustron steel drawers and base cabinets used in the kitchen, buffet, vanity and bathroom are all interchangeable. This feature applies to almost all steel parts.

Since purchase of this home, the current owner has made some cosmetic changes. These included applying wall-to-wall carpeting on top of the original asphalt floor tile and installing a new design floor tile on top of the old in the kitchen, utility room and bathroom. The original horizontal Venetian blinds have been replaced with verticals. The original paint color on the kitchen, utility room and bathroom walls is yellow. In order to carry out a black and white theme with the remainder of the decor, the owner has covered some of the yellow with white enamel. A few drawers and doors have been painted black for accent value. The exterior of the house retains its original yellow color with the exception of the roof and exterior metal trim which were recently painted brown, again for the proper accent.

The only major addition to the original house has been central air conditioning. However, it is completely independent of the forced air heating system and is unobtrusive in appearance.

Again, the Lustron home conveys a very neat, smooth, orderly design inside and out. The exterior really glistens in the sunlight like a new car. It should be emphasized that all exterior and interior panels are easily cleaned with a damp cloth and maintained like a car finish. The entire porcelain enameled interior and exterior of the house require little or no maintenance.

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Coombs Lustron House
Porter County, Indiana

The Coombs Lustron House is significant under Criterion C as a rare and intact example of a significant manufactured housing type employing an unusual building material. The Lustron house combined America's interest in prefabricated housing with the fascination Americans held for a new potential building material--steel plating. Furthermore, intact Lustron homes such as 411 Bowser Street provide an important glimpse into American domestic life in the 1940s. The Coombs Lustron House meets Criterion Consideration G. It has exceptional local significance as one of the most intact Lustrons in Porter County. The Lustron house type has been the subject of much research. Although the house type is less than 50 years old, the last Lustrons were built 42 years ago, allowing ample time for professional objectivity.

The Lustron home inherits many of its qualities from two porcelain enameled steel houses which were displayed at the Chicago "Century of Progress" Exposition in 1933-34. One of these, the Stan-Steel House, incorporated a steel framing system to which the porcelain enameled steel exterior panels were attached. The second, the Armco-Ferro House, had no separate steel framing system but used formed steel panels which became load-bearing interior and exterior walls and were covered with porcelain enamel. Ferro Corporation claimed to offer the world's first porcelain enameled steel house in October 1932. (Lustron provided a steel framing system for the attachment of its porcelain enamel panels in and out, similar to Stan-Steel.)

In 1935, the Armco-Ferro house was moved from the Chicago Fair location to a site in Beverly Shores, Indiana, where it remains occupied today. In 1986, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Coombs-Morrow Lustron House in Chesterton is located just a few miles from this historic Armco-Ferro dwelling.

It should be noted that the Lustron design also closely follows Frank Lloyd Wright's vision of affordable housing used in his Usonian houses starting in the late 1930s. His concept was to omit the basement, eliminate interior "trim" and plastering, to use radiant heating and built-in furniture--all solid innovations that mix construction economies with stylistic dogma within the Lustron design.

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Coams Lustron House
Porter County, Indiana

The Lustron design was basically created by engineers to adapt it to mass production. This house is an engineering marvel. A steel framing system was devised consisting of vertical steel studs and roof-ceiling trusses to which all interior and exterior panels were attached. The concept of prefabricated housing was well established by firms such as Alladin, Gordon-Van Tine, Montgomery Ward, and Sears in the early 1900s. These companies, however, used conventional balloon-framing techniques and materials in their kits.

The engineering feat of the development and production of the Lustron house was the responsibility of Carl Strandlund, the vice-president of Chicago Vitreous Enamel Products Company which produced and sold porcelain enameled panels since the late 1920s. After WWII, the domestic demand for steel exceeded production and the federal government exercised control over its allocation. Strandlund had orders for his procelain enameled panels for use in construction for new gas stations for Standard Oil. He made a request for allocation of steel, but was denied. However, he was advised by Wilson Wyatt, Housing Expediter during the Truman administration, that steel would be available if Strandlund produced steel houses instead of gas stations.

Whereupon Strandlund developed the Lustron prototype house at Hinsdale, Illinois, in the fall of 1946 which he claimed was fireproof, imperivous to decay, rust, or damage from vermin, rats or termites. Sunlight, salt water, or chemical fumes could not stain or fade the finish. The roof never had to be replaced, the exterior painted, nor the interior painted or papered.

Wyatt endorsed the idea, but was unable to convince Congressional members to appropriate funds for Strandlund. In turn Wyatt resigned his post, but other influential members of Congress were successful in getting support to finance the production of Lustron homes. through the government agency, Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), Strandlund ultimately recieved over \$37 million in loans plus a leased war surplus plant in Columbus, Ohio. This was the first venture capital loan made by the federal government. Initially, Strandlund was provided the availability of a war surplus plant in Chicago.

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Coams Lustron House
Porter County, Indiana

However, due to the political intrigue in government, Tucker, who proposed to produce a radical new automobile, acquired the plant. In turn, Tucker shortly failed in his business operation. The political ramifications are as fascinating as the engineering of the Lustron homes.

The Lustron factory had approximately eight miles of automated conveyer lines and included 11 enameling furnaces, each of which was more than 180 feet long. The plant equipment included presses for tubs and sinks. The bathtub press could stamp a tub in one draw and could produce 1000 tubs a day at capacity.

Specially designed trailer trucks were used as the final assembling point where the manufactured parts came off the assembly line. There were approximately 3300 individual parts in a complete house loaded on a single trailer. The trucks then delivered the house package to the building site.

Lustron established builder-dealers, which in turn sold and erected the house package on a concrete foundation. In 20 months of production and sales, Lustron lost money on each house, and in turn, was not able to repay the RFC loan. RFC foreclosed on Lustron and production stopped on June 6, 1950. On the Lustron order book were contracts for more than 8000 housing units which were never shipped.

The dealer-builder for Lustron in this area (Porter and LaPorte counties) erected approximately seven units in Porter County. Of these, a Chesterton house had its garage roof destroyed by a falling tree limb. It was replaced with a conventional roof. Also, the owner installed a masonry fireplace and chimney which substantially alters its original condition. In the town of Porter, a Lustron home has a frame garage as does a Lustron house in Valparaiso. The four Lustron houses in Beverly Shores have all been altered with attached frame porches and/or interior modifications and arrangements.

The Coams Lustron is clearly outstanding among those remaining in Porter County. It was given the highest possible rating by the Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory. Norris and Hariett Coams purchased the three bedroom (model 03, the largest

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Coams Lustron House
Porter County, Indiana

Lustron offered) from local dealers/contractors Tonn and Blank in 1950 and it was completed that year. The Coams, who had three children, occupied the home for many years. Norris Coams helped organize the Chesterton Historical Society and served as president for a number of years. Mr. Coams was an electrician for NIPSCO (Northern Indiana Public Service Company).

As a final note of recognition of the Lustron home was made in the book Yesterday's Houses of Tomorrow by H. Ward Jandl published in 1991 by The Preservation Press. The author selected 12 innovative American homes from 1850 to 1950 that were consciously designed and publicized as prototypes for the future. And, of course, the Lustron house is fully described as the "all-metal dream house," that was mass produced well within the income of home buyers--one that provides durability and permanence in construction and is almost maintenance free.

It can be claimed that Lustron was having a very considerable influence in the industrializing of the building industry by providing an example of how modern factory methods could be applied to the production of desirable and livable housing. It is most unfortunate that the company was not permitted to continue.

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Coams Lustron House
Porter County, Indiana

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Big Plans for a Little House," Business Week, p. 44, October 16, 1948.

Brochures, Camera Tour Through Lustron Home, The Lustron Home, Lustron Garages.

Copies in collection of present owner James P. Morrow

Correspondence from Tonn and Blank Builders to original owners, Norris B. and Harriet Coams.

Interviews

James P. Morrow, Owner, December 9, 1991

Dorie Partsch, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Historian, Jan. 31, 1992

H. Ward Jandl, Yesterday's Houses of Tomorrow, Preservation Press, 1991.

Lustron Newsletter, February 24, 1950, Vol. 3 No. 8.

Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio, Collection #MSS861 of Lustron history and documents, including:

Advertisements from the 1940s

Agreements

Congressional Record, 1947-1951

Corporate Records

Correspondence, 1946-1971

Dealers, 1949-50

Newspaper clippings, 1947-1982

Newspaper clippings, 1948-51

Press Releases, 1946-1959

Price Lists, Costs, 1949-1950

Reports, 1947-1953

United States Senate Special Subcommittee on Banking and Currency, 1948

Life Magazine, April 19, 1948, Lustron advertisement

Records from Lustron donated by R. Harold Denton to Ohio

Historical Society in Columbus, Ohio, collection #MSS861

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Coams Lustron House
Porter County, Indiana

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY (continued)

Wolfe, Tom and Garfield, Leonard, "A New Standard for Living:
The Lustron House, 1946-50," Perspectives in Vernacular
Architecture, 1989, The Curators of University of Missouri
Press, Columbia, Missouri.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA
Verbal Boundary

Lots 15 and 16, Block 11, Morgan Park Addition to the town of
Chesterton, Porter County, Indiana.

Boundary Justification

This is the historic property boundary, inclusive of both
Coams house and garage.



