

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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

1. Name of Property

historic name Polk Street Concrete Cottage Historic District

other names/site number The Edison Concept Houses

2. Location

street & number 604 - 614 Polk Street

N/A

not for publication

city or town Gary

N/A

vicinity

state Indiana

code IN

county Lake

code 089

zip code 46402

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national

statewide

X local

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Polk Street Concrete Cottage Historic District
Name of Property

Lake Co., IN
County and State

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	
4	2	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
4	2	Total

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

Concrete in the Steel City: The Edison
Concept Houses of Gary, Indiana

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.)

AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Craftsman/Bungalow

Materials (Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: CONCRETE

roof: ASPHALT

other:

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Name of Property

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Narrative Description

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

Summary Paragraph

The Polk Street Concrete Cottage Historic District consists of four individual houses located in the First Subdivision of Gary, Indiana. They are located on the west side of the 600 block of Polk Street. The district contains four contributing resources, and two noncontributing resources (garages). All the houses are occupied.

Narrative Description

The district is located on Polk Street between 6th and 7th Avenues. It is bordered on the north by an apartment building, on the east by Polk Street and a parochial school, on the south by the school's playground, and on the west by an alley, a house, and a church.

In plan, each cottage is identical in size. Their footprints are east-to-west oriented, 16'x40' rectangular blocks separated by only a few feet. The porches are approximately 6'x16.' 604 and 612 have second stories that run the length of the house, and are assumed to have three bedrooms. The upper story of 608 and 612 only covers about two-thirds of the building's footprint, and is assumed to have two bedrooms. In elevation, the concrete cottages are two stories in height, and have raised basements. Side and rear elevations are devoid of ornament. In proper light, the two foot square modules of the metal concrete forms used in the 1910 construction of the houses are visible. Side opening are placed in functional locations. For example, small casement windows light living rooms that are located adjacent to the porch, and doubled windows light dining areas located in the center of the house. Additional openings allow for one window per room per side for cross ventilation. Each front façade displays a raised, one story, flat roofed porch. The monotony of repetition typical of mass-produced housing is lessened through variations in the number and location of windows, stylized parapets, and cast details.

Only 612 Polk Street is completely constructed of concrete. 604, 608, and 614 have concrete exterior walls and porches. The roof, floors, and interior partitions are constructed of dimensional lumber. Each house has a flat roof (that sheds to the building's rear), front and side parapet walls, and a chimney. Architectural ornamentation is formed in the front façade's concrete walls. Cast details include panels, drop ornamentation, windowsills, and varying parapet walls.

604 Polk Street (Photo #3)

The main façade of 604 Polk Street has a single story, flat roof porch that covers the lower story. It is accessed from its north side. The porch façade is topped by copings that simulate capitals. The wall's outer edges are battered. Two large window openings have been enclosed with paired one-over-one double-hung windows. The openings are topped with flat hoods supported by brackets. The brackets at the center of the porch are longer than the outer brackets. A rectangular recessed ornament is located between the windows, and four, recessed rectangles are located below the lower corners of the two window openings.

The second story has a flat parapet roof topped with a simple coping. The coping connects two decorative corbel blocks. A central one-over-one double-hung window, flanked by smaller one-over-one double-hung windows, is located over the porch. All three windows are linked by a cast concrete sill. A long, recessed, horizontal rectangle, flanked by recessed ornamentation, is located over the windows.

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608 Polk Street (Photo #4)

The lower story of 608 Polk Street is a one-story porch that has a central entry door flanked by two windows. It has been enclosed with a door and two six-over-one double-hung windows. The porch's parapet roof has paired battlement-like tabs on each corner that extend past the roofline. Two one-over-one double-hung windows are located above the porch on the second story, and are linked with a common window sill. The façade is topped with a gabled parapet. A recessed ornament of a half circle over an elongated rectangle is located in the center of the parapet. Ornaments of cast squares over large inverted triangles are located on the façade's outer edges.

The property has a non-contributing one-story garage.

612 Polk Street (Photo #5)

612 Polk Street has a one-story porch accessed from the south façade. Its front wall is slightly battered. The porch's east, or front, façade has two large, square openings with slightly arched tops and chamfered upper corners. The porch's roof has battlement-like tabs that extend past the roofline at its center and on each corner. The house's front façade has paired one-over-one double-hung windows adjacent to the entry door. The upper story has two one-over-one double-hung windows with formed concrete sills. The façade is topped by a Mission Style inspired pent roof parapet supported by decorative concrete brackets. The wedge-shaped brackets display recessed squares, and are located over decorative recessed triangles.

The property has a non-contributing one-story garage.

614 Polk Street (Photo #6)

The porch for 612 Polk Street is entered from the north. The porch's flat roof is topped by a coping and has battlement-like tabs on each corner that extend upwards past the roofline. The tabs have decorative recessed pentagonal shapes. The house's façade has an entry door and paired one-over-one double-hung windows on the ground floor. The upper story has two one-over-one double-hung windows with formed concrete sills. The façade is topped by a parapet that displays a low pediment flanked by battlement-like tabs. Decorative recessed ornamentation is located at the center of the pediment and on the wall's outer edges.

The second story has been enlarged by extending the floor over the ground story (Photo #8). A gable-roofed canopy extends off the rear of the house.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

ENGINEERING

INVENTION

Period of Significance

1910-1960

Significant Dates

1910

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Creighton, D.F.

The United States Sheet and Tin Plate Company

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Period of Significance (justification)

The district's period of significance is 1910-1960. Cottage construction began in 1910, and the fifty year benchmark for eligibility is 1960. City directories indicate the mill continued to rent the houses to employees into the early 1970's. Rental periods appear to have been as short as a year and for up to decade or more in length. Some units continued to be rented for several years to the widows of mill workers.

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Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

None.

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

The Polk Street Concrete Cottage Historic District is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A as an example of the historic trends in the development and growth of the City of Gary. It represents a novel concept for house construction designed, patented, and promoted by inventor Thomas A. Edison, and refined by other architects and inventors. Their construction was regarded as the country's first experiment of this type of large-scale housing production. Constructed for the employees of the U.S. Sheet and Tin Plate Company, they are also representative of one solution to the city's housing shortage caused by the influx of workers to the new mills. The district was identified in the Multiple Property Document Form "Concrete in the Steel City: The Edison Concept Houses of Gary, Indiana."

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

The district is eligible under Criterion C as an outstanding example of early twentieth century company-supplied worker housing that utilized experimental methods and materials of house construction. The houses were designed by architect D. F. Creighton of Ambridge, Pennsylvania. They exhibit simple, efficient, and homey spaces. The use of varying building heights, and cast details shows the architect understood the need for variation to lessen the monotony of mass production. The cottages are identified in the Lake County Interim Report and received an Outstanding rating.

The district is one of five included in the *Concrete in the Steel City: The Edison Concept Houses of Gary, Indiana* (2007) Multiple Property Document within the historic context of *United States Sheet and Tin Plate Company Concrete Houses of Gary, Indiana, 1910-1957*. By 1910, Gary's private enterprises could not meet the housing demand caused by the new U.S. Steel mill works and its subsidiaries. To help speed the transfer of management level employees, the subsidiary U.S. Sheet and Tin Plate Company constructed worker housing in cottages, apartments, and terraces of formed concrete. Later census data shows that the Polk Street cottages were rented to non-management level employees of the mill. It appears that by 1920, some managers and their families had secured housing elsewhere in the community. U.S. Sheet and Tin Plate Company continued to rent the Polk Street concrete houses to both their managers and general laborers into the 1970s; the concrete houses fulfilled their purpose of providing company housing for over 60 years.

The houses are the first large-scale attempt of employing Thomas Edison's concept of providing affordable and sanitary housing for the working classes. Beginning in 1906, Edison patented metal forms and a process for casting a house in a single pour. While Edison never successfully employed his invention, the concept was assumed and developed by others, including the Reichert Manufacturing Company (that patented the forms used in Gary). The method was described in 1920 as "small, light-weight unit steel forms."ⁱ Their advantage over other concrete forming systems (for instance wood or hydraulic forms) was the ability to be assembled with unskilled labor in repeated applications. The forms were invented and patented in Milwaukee, Wisconsin by August Reichert in 1911, and sold under the name of Reichert Adjustable Metal Forms. Apparently, it was further refined about 1919 and renamed Metaforms. The company is still actively producing concrete related products.

ⁱ Whipple, *Concrete Houses: How They Were Built*, 10.

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The houses in the district are privately owned. The Multiple Property Document presented the houses' historic context, significance, and conditions for listing. To be eligible, the district, must display the integrity of design, location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The overall design of the district's cottages is intact. Their exteriors represent original design and construction. The concrete building material has not been covered or altered. While two of the porches have been enclosed, they remain identifiable as a porch. The cottages are in their original location, and the historic, residential, First Subdivision context remains relatively intact. The cottage's materials represent the workmanship of materials, most notably the concrete walls and formed details.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

None.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Christopher Baas, *Concrete in the Steel City: The Edison Concept Houses of Gary, Indiana* (Multiple Property Document, 2007).

Harvey Whipple, "How Will the Individual Owner Get a Concrete House?," *Concrete Houses: How They Were Built*, (Detroit: Concrete-Cement Age Publishing Company, 1920).

Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, *Lake County Interim Report: Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory*, (Indianapolis, 1996).

Metaforms. Company files, Milwaukee, WI

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Lake Co., IN
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Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

Acreage of Property Less than one acre
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

3	Zone	Easting	Northing
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4
 Zone Easting Northing

The Polk Street Cottages Historic District starts at a point of beginning on the northwest property corner of 604 Polk Street; then east to the northeast property line of 604 Polk Street; then south to a point southeast corner of 614 Polk Street; then west to a point even with the west property line of 614 Polk Street, then north to the point of beginning.

The boundary uses easily identifiable points to define its limits, includes all contributing resources, and excludes neighboring properties. The boundary includes the free-standing concrete houses, which are the only resource of its type on this section of Polk Street.

name/title Christopher Baas

organization date March 2010

street & number 21116 North Banbury telephone (317) 877-7799

city or town Noblesville state IN zip code 46062

e-mail

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

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

Name of Property: Polk Street Concrete Cottage Historic District

City or Vicinity: Gary

County: Lake Co. State: Indiana

Photographer: Christopher Baas

Date Photographed: August 2, 2008

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

604-612 Polk Street looking southwest. Photographed August 2, 2008.
1 of 10.

604-612 Polk Street looking northwest. Photographed August 2, 2008.
2 of 10.

604 Polk Street looking west. Photographed August 2, 2008.
3 of 10

608 Polk Street looking west. Photographed August 2, 2008.
4 of 10.

612 Polk Street looking west. Photographed August 2, 2008.
5 of 10

614 Polk Street looking west. Photographed August 2, 2008.
6 of 10.

604-612 Polk Street looking southeast. Photographed August 2, 2008.
7 of 10.

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604-612 Polk Street looking northeast. Photographed August 2, 2008.
8 of 10.

614 Polk Street looking west (detail). Photographed August 2, 2008.
9 of 10

608 Polk Street looking west (detail). Photographed August 2, 2008.
10 of 10

Property Owner:

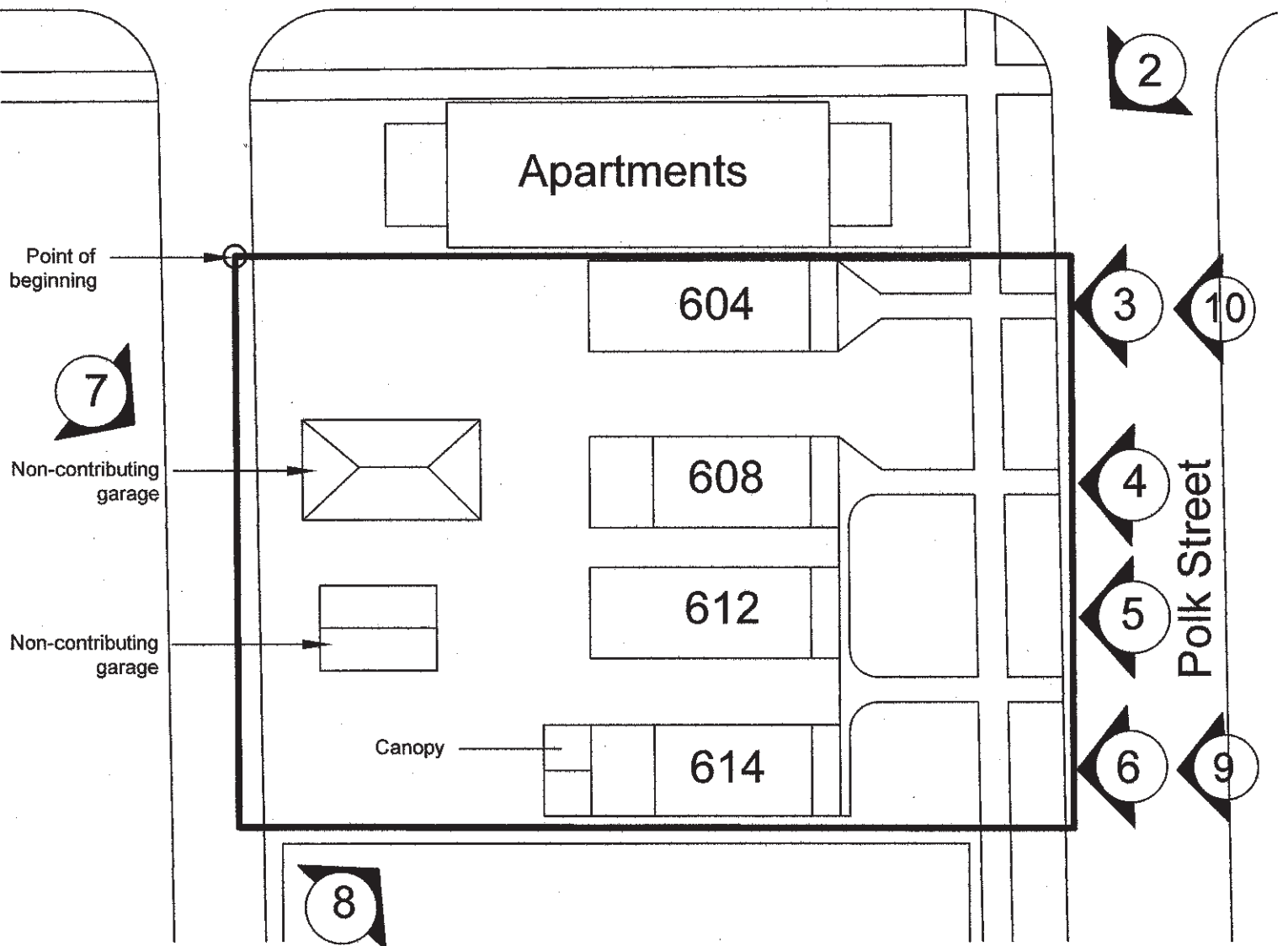
(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

6th Avenue



District Boundary



Photo Number and Direction

Polk Street Concrete Cottage Historic District
Gary, Indiana (Lake County)



