

Photodocumentation of the Robert Pfeiler Farmhouse, Ventura County, California

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Technical Report 04-02
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Statistical Research, Inc. (SRI), undertook photographic documentation of the Robert Pfeiler Farmhouse as part of the John Laing Homes Pfeiler Property Project, located in Oxnard's Northeast Community Specific Plan area of western Ventura County, California (Tentative Tract No. 5389). A Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) was prepared for this project, in compliance with requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (Dudek & Associates 2003). In terms of cultural resources, several mitigation measures were identified that would reduce the identified potential impacts of the project to less than significant levels. Documenting the Robert Pfeiler Farmhouse prior to its demolition is one of these mitigation measures, and it was recommended by the Ventura County Cultural Heritage Board after a hearing on the project on March 10, 2003. Documentation of the farmhouse consists of:

- a summary of the history of the property
- a footprint diagram of the building, pool, and outbuildings
- a footprint diagram of the building, pool, and outbuildings with a photographic key for images taken of the building and associated features in 2003
- 57 photographs taken in 2003 to document the interior and exterior of the building prior to demolition
- 17 historical photographs (most likely all taken by Robert Pfeiler himself) of the building, pool, and outbuildings
- compilation of a folder of information used by Robert Pfeiler and his wife when planning for construction of the farmhouse

History of the Property

Robert Pfeiler (1908–2002) was a fourth-generation Ventura County resident who spent essentially all of his life on an Oxnard ranch in an area between Rose Avenue and Oxnard Boulevard, south of Gonzales Road. His property was part of what had been a much larger parcel, originally purchased by German immigrants Gottfried Maulhardt, Jacob Maulhardt, and Johannes Borchard from Juan Camarillo in 1872. By 1873, most of the land belonged to Gottfried Maulhardt. By the time of his death in 1898, Maulhardt's holdings had dwindled to approximately 30 acres (for more-detailed information on the history of the property, see Majewski and Tolley [2002]). On July 5, 1904, his widow, Sophia, sold the acreage to Louis Pfeiler. Pfeiler gave the farm to his eldest son Albert as a wedding gift on September 3, 1904 (Maulhardt 2001:444). Albert and his family maintained residence on the farm until early 1938, when Albert passed the property on to his son Robert, after his wedding on December 5, 1937 (*Ventura County Star-Free Press*, 19 February 1967:10). After Robert died in 2002, members of his family owned the property until it was sold to John Laing Homes in late 2003.

In recent years, prior to development of the parcel by John Laing Homes, the Pfeiler Farm property comprised 19 historical-period buildings and structures, some of which are grouped by readily visible relations. One grouping consists of the 1948–1949 Robert Pfeiler Farmhouse, pool, and outbuildings that are the subject of this report. Another includes the 1873 Maulhardt/Pfeiler Farmhouse; the Winery/Storehouse, probably built in the late 1870s, and a barn/garage believed to have been built prior to 1905. The remainder of the buildings occur on the northern portion of the parcel, and include a small garage, a utility building, a large equipment barn, and an ancillary barns/storage building group. Majewski and Tolley (2002) describe and evaluate all of the buildings as to their significance and eligibility for listing

in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the California Register of Historical Resources (California Register), and as Ventura County Landmarks. Of the 19 buildings and structures, the 1873 Maulhardt/Pfeiler Farmhouse, the Winery/Storehouse, and the pre-1905 barn/garage were recommended as eligible for listing in the California Register and as Ventura County Landmarks. These three buildings will remain on a small (0.86-acre) lot and be protected with a preservation covenant and preserved for historical uses.

While the 1948–1949 Robert Pfeiler Farmhouse, pool, and outbuildings were not recommended as eligible for listing in either the NRHP, the California Register, or as Ventura County Landmarks, Majewski and Tolley (2002) describe and minimally document the complex. The current report, however, extensively photodocuments all aspects of the farmhouse, pool, and outbuildings in the complex.

Sometime prior to the fall of 1948, the original Maulhardt barn (Majewski and Tolley 2002:Figure 6) was demolished to make room for Robert Pfeiler's new farmhouse on the property. According to Susan Pfeiler Brown (personal communication 2003), some elements of the barn were incorporated into the foundation of the new farmhouse. Robert Pfeiler and his wife Betty built a home in the at-that-time new Ranch style. As noted in Nequette and Jeffery (2002:292–293):

It is primarily the California architect Cliff May who should be credited with the creation of the modern ranch house, as he was both designer and promoter of a house form that would accommodate and encourage the kind of familial closeness and hospitality that was part of early Californian Hispanic culture. May based his designs on nineteenth-century California adobe haciendas or ranchos, which were L- or U-shaped in plan, thus creating a courtyard that was in many ways the primary living space of the house. The buildings hugged the ground, with low-pitched roofs and rather understated front facades of simple vertical openings. The relatively open interiors were most probably the influence of the Prairie-style house by Frank Lloyd Wright. May designed many houses in San Diego and Los Angeles in the 1930s that were subsequently published in *Sunset* magazine, but it was in the late 1940s postwar housing boom that the style was exported to other western states and evolved into the more common linear form associated with the popularity of the automobile and the larger lot sizes of suburban residential neighborhoods.

Although no original plans could be located for the Robert Pfeiler Farmhouse, either in the Ventura County Planning Department or with family members, it is clear that the house was built along the designs of May and other architects who were influenced by him at the time. The U-shaped house was custom finished. Pfeiler and his wife spent long hours prior to building the house researching different materials and fixtures, and apparently acted in some sense as their own contractors, corresponding with suppliers and placing orders (see folder of materials compiled from the Pfeilers' originals records). Many of these fixtures and materials are visible in the interior photographs of the house taken in 2003. Apparently their pool was the "first family swimming pool" in Oxnard (Mitchell 2002:B3).

The house went up quickly, as evidenced in the series of historical photographs provided here. The foundation was laid in late summer–early fall of 1948, and by January 1949, the building was largely completed. We are fortunate to have many photographs that were dated on the actual prints. This is probably a result of Robert Pfeiler's interest in photography and the fact that he developed much of the film he shot. He was also apparently a great chronicler of events—and building this house was clearly a significant event for him and his family. The pool, BBQ house, and dressing rooms were built in 1952–1953, and a series of historical photographs documents the sequence of their construction. Both the historical and 2003 photographs show the Pfeilers' interest in landscaping over the years.

Photographic Documentation

As noted above, the photographic documentation consists of 57 photographs taken in 2003 and 17 historical photographs. Preceding the documentation are two figures. One is a footprint of the house floor plan and the pool and outbuildings. This was created by SRI because no original construction documents could be found for the house. A copy of the footprint with photographic locations for the 2003 images is also included, to allow the reader to visualize the layouts of the interior and exterior of the house and other buildings. In all photographs, the cardinal directions indicate direction of view (i.e., which wall of the room). In the 2003 images, photographs are grouped first by interior shot, then by exterior shots. Figures 1–35 were taken on April 21, 2003, by Eric Means of Means Design and Building Corporation, Tucson, Arizona. Figures 36 and 37 were taken on December 12, 2003, by Van Martin of John Laing Homes, Van Nuys, California. The historical photographs were most likely all taken by Robert Pfeiler and used here courtesy of his daughter, Susan Pfeiler Brown.

References Cited

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- 2002 *An Architectural and Archaeological Assessment of the Pfeiler Farm Property, Ventura County, California*. Technical Report 02-57. Statistical Research, Tucson.

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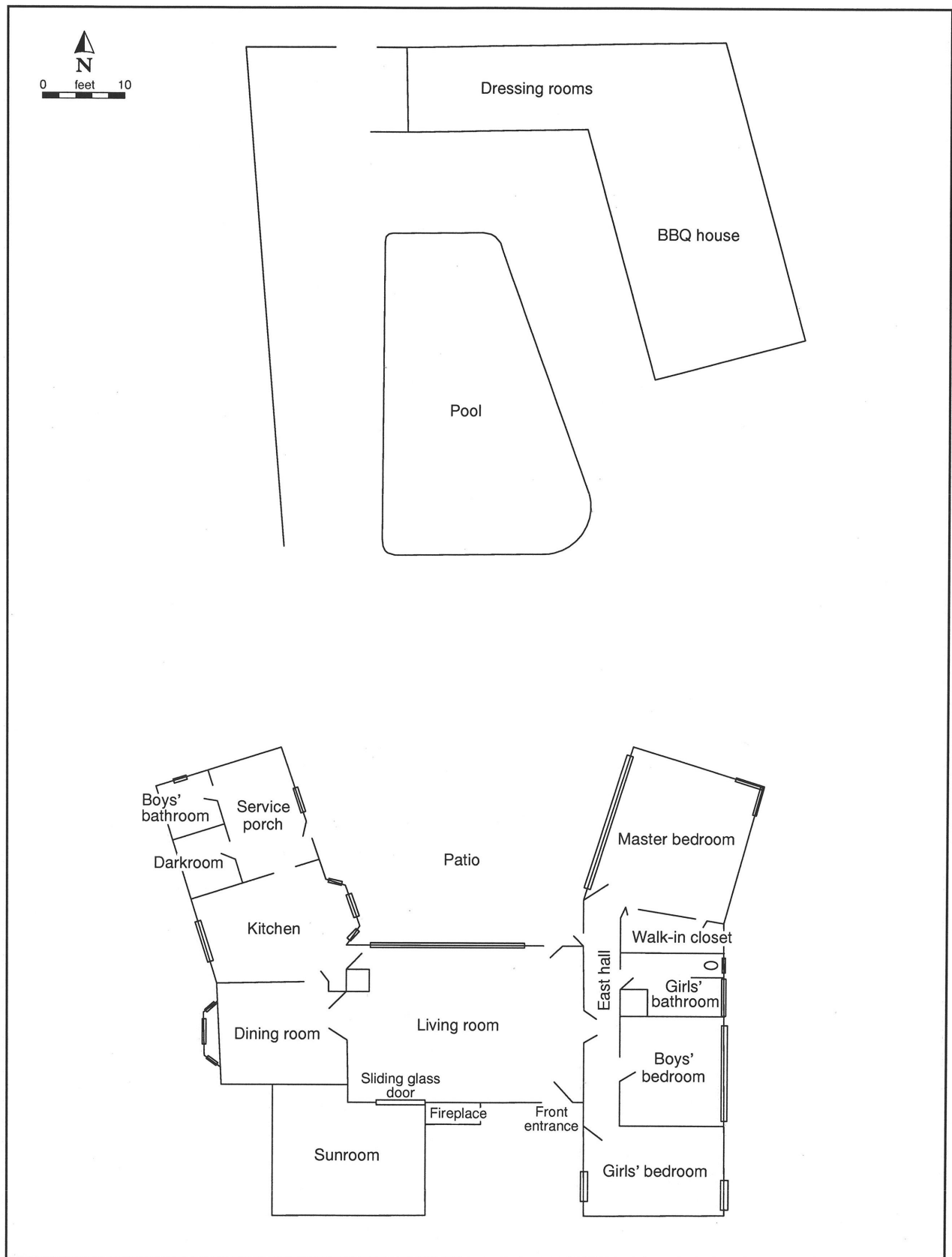
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Nequette, Anne M., and R. Brooks Jeffery

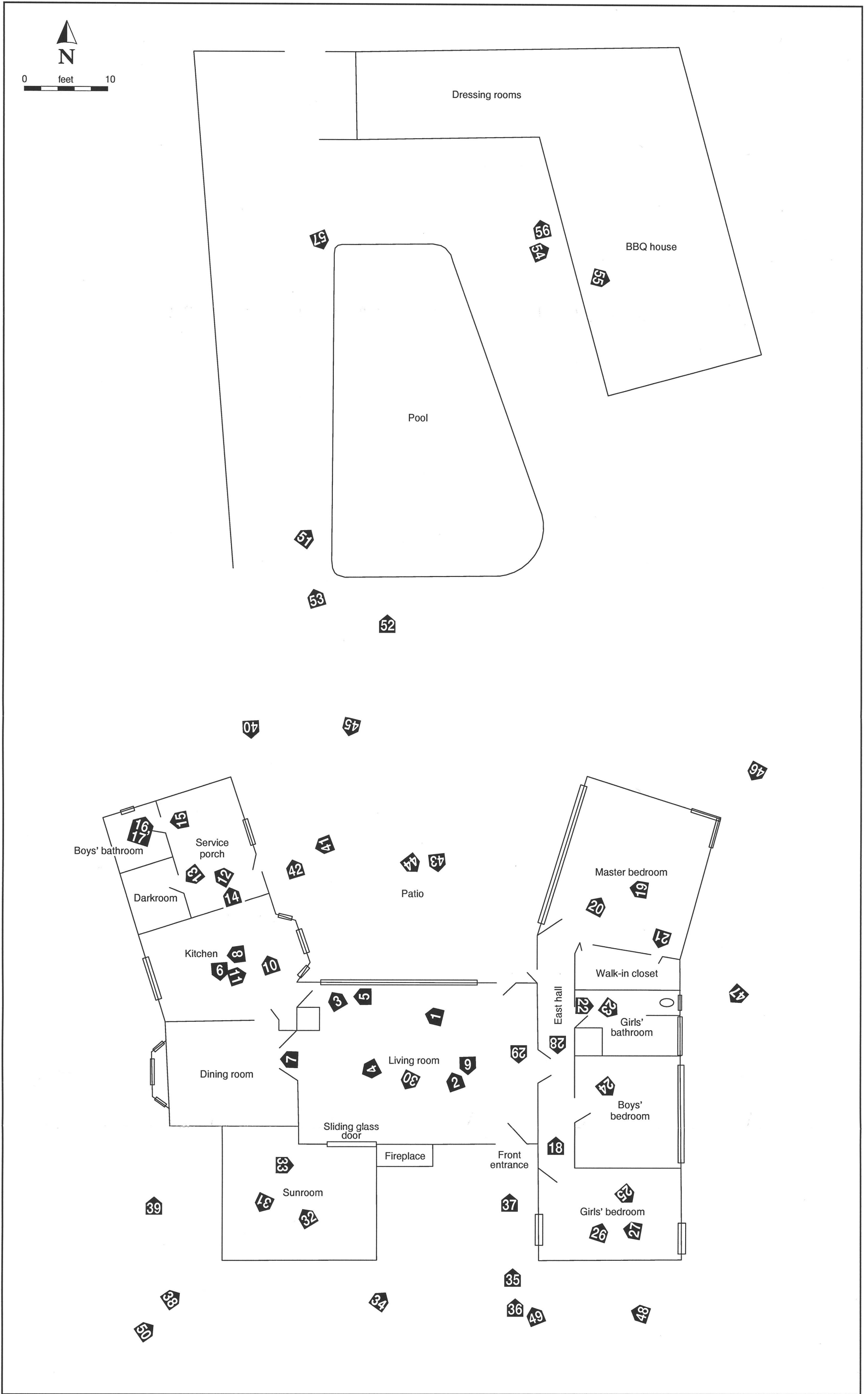
- 2002 *A Guide to Tucson Architecture*. University of Arizona Press, Tucson.

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- 1967 Interview with Robert Pfeiler. 19 February. Ventura, California.



Floor plan of 1948-1949 Robert Pfeiler Farmhouse, pool, and outbuildings.



Floor plan of 1948-1949 Robert Pfeiler Farmhouse, pool, and outbuildings with photographic key for images taken of the building and associated features in 2003.

**Photographs of the Farmhouse, Pool, and Outbuildings
Taken in 2003**

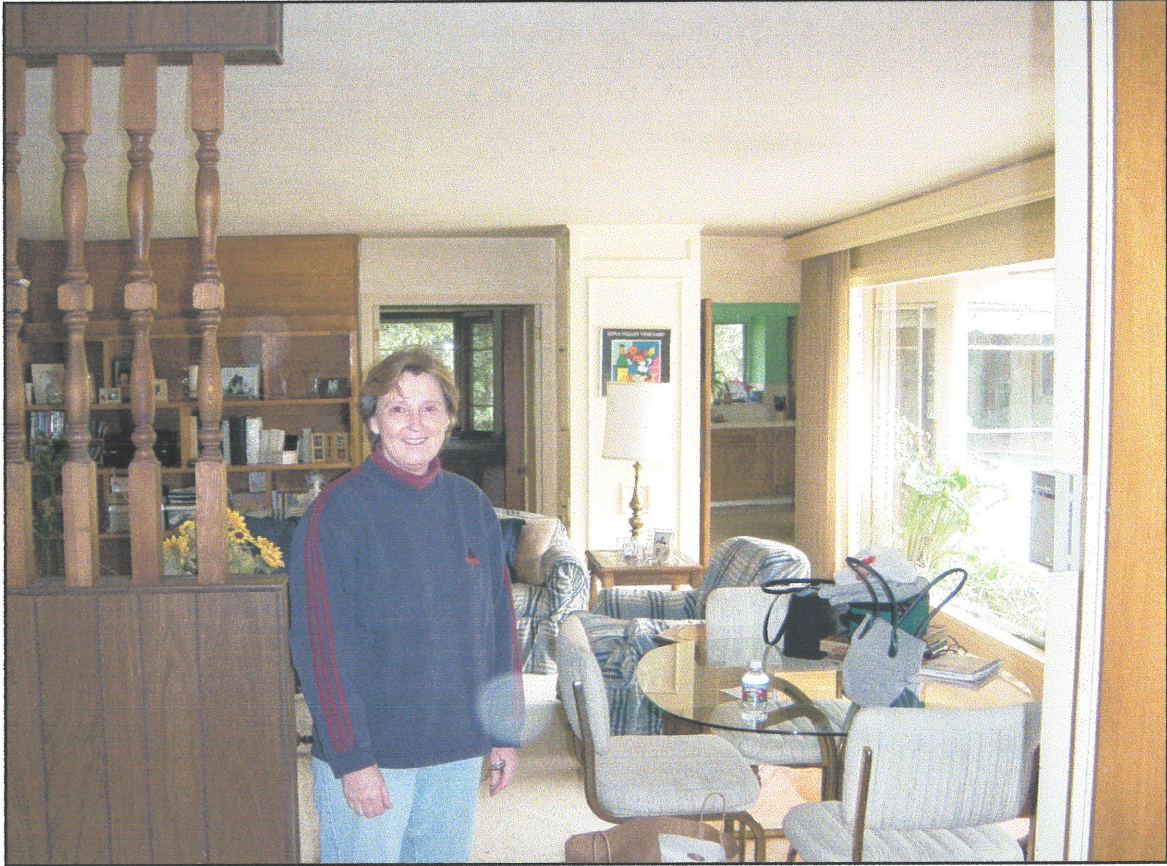


Figure 1. Living room looking west into kitchen, with Susan Pfeiler Brown in the foreground (daughter of Robert J. and Margaret Elizabeth “Betty” Pfeiler, who were the original builders of the house).



Figure 2. Living room window looking north. This is an exceptionally large sheet of glass, rare by modern standards. Modern code requires tempered glass to be used this close to the ground. The glass is installed in an aluminum frame with screwed-in aluminum stops. The surround and the sill have fluted trim. The existing oak base and oak parquet floor tile are visible. The line of a previous taller base board is visible parallel to the top of the base. Blue paint is visible beneath the yellow paint. Plaster on the walls of the room is smooth with some wicked moisture that caused salt damage at the base of the wall.



Figure 3. Detail of the southwest corner of the living room window and surround, looking north.



Figure 4. Living room looking west toward the entrance to the dining room at the right rear of the photograph. Note wood shelving and louvered door.



Figure 5. Living room looking west. Note large sheet glass window in north wall of living room and wood (oak) parquet floor tiles. Kitchen door (right) is a bi-swinging door made of mahogany. Door to dining room on left.



Figure 6. Living room looking south. Flagstone fireplace laid with 1-inch-thick edge exposed. Firebox is fire brick on running bond with a ceramic tile hearth. A wood-paneled half wall with spindles on top to the ceiling separates the entry to the east from the living room. Note original 1950s-style clock.



Figure 7. Dining room looking west. Note bay window with built-in buffet below.



Figure 8. Kitchen looking west. The walls have a smooth plaster finish with semigloss paint. Windows are aluminum, and the counters are made from 6-by-6-inch tiles.



Figure 9. Kitchen looking south with mahogany swinging door to the dining room on the left.



**Figure 10. Kitchen looking north, with bay window nook to the east.
Door in center of photograph is to the service porch.**



Figure 11. Kitchen looking east. Bay window overlooks patio, and living room can be seen through door on the right.



Figure 12. Service porch looking west into darkroom. Boys' bathroom is on right. Note painted hardwood built-in cabinets.

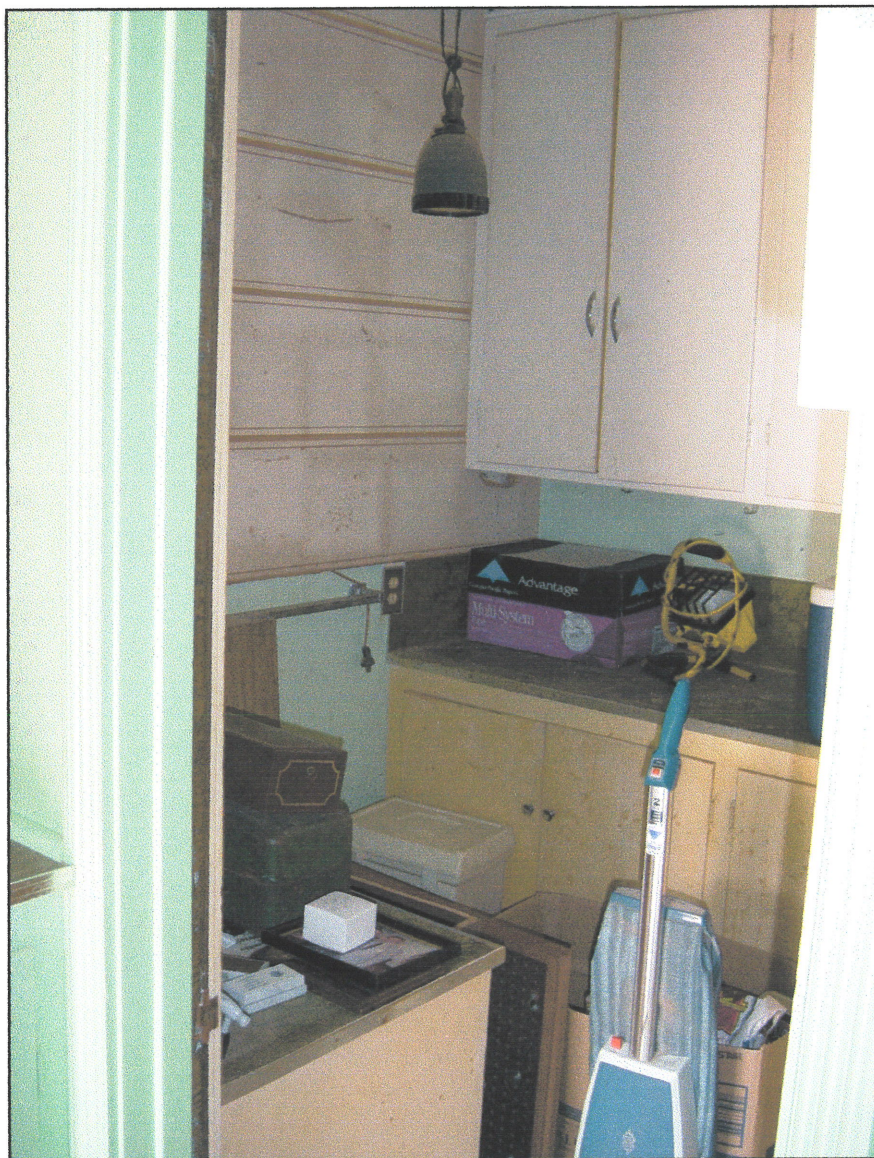


Figure 13. Darkroom looking west. Note stained birch cabinets and metal trim on counter top. The door has weather-stripping to seal off the light when the door is closed. A darkroom fixture hangs from the ceiling.



Figure 14. Service porch looking north. Cabinets are painted hardwood cabinets, and there are a birch door and window to the east. Counters are covered with a sheet material held in place with metal trim. The ceiling fixture is recessed.



Figure 15. Boys' bathroom looking west. Cabinets are painted wood, and the floor is covered with 1-by-1-inch ceramic tiles. The plaster-and-frame shower enclosure has 4-by-4-inch nominal ceramic tile.



**Figure 16. Boys' bathroom looking northeast.
The painted cabinet has a recent counter top, sink, and faucet.
The floor base is 4-inch nominal with bull-nosed top and
cove as well as integral corner-wrapping door frame.**



**Figure 17. Boys' bathroom looking northeast.
The medicine cabinet is built in and the
extending round mirror and soap dish have the same
chrome finish as the medicine cabinet. (The cabinet and
the extending round mirror appear to be original.)**



Figure 18. East hall looking north. Intersecting hall from the living room to the west is visible (left). Doors are mahogany with fluted casing, and hardware is brass. Note shag carpeting probably laid in the 1960s or 1970s.



Figure 19. Master bedroom looking west. Windows overlook patio.



Figure 20. Master bedroom looking north.



Figure 21. Master bedroom looking south into “mother’s dressing area.” Closet visible on right has sliding panel door.



**Figure 22. Girls' bathroom, looking east.
Note glass-block panel over bathtub.**



**Figure 23. Girls' bathroom looking southeast.
Note glass-block panel over bathtub.**



Figure 24. Boys' bedroom looking southeast. Note built-in dresser.



Figure 25. Girls' bedroom looking southeast.



Figure 26. Girls' bedroom looking north toward built-in louvered closets with drawers below.



Figure 27. Girls' bedroom looking west. Window overlooks entry area to the west.



**Figure 28. East hall looking south toward girls' bedroom.
Doors are mahogany with painted, fluted trim.**



**Figure 29. Entry hall looking south.
Spindled room divider to the right.**



Figure 30. Living room looking south into sunroom.



Figure 31. Sunroom with anodized aluminum framing, looking southwest. The sunroom was added on to the southern part of the house in the late 1980s.



Figure 32. Sunroom looking northwest. Note oak cabinetry.



Figure 33. Sunroom looking southeast. Note planter holes in the floor, and the display of aviation-related photographs.

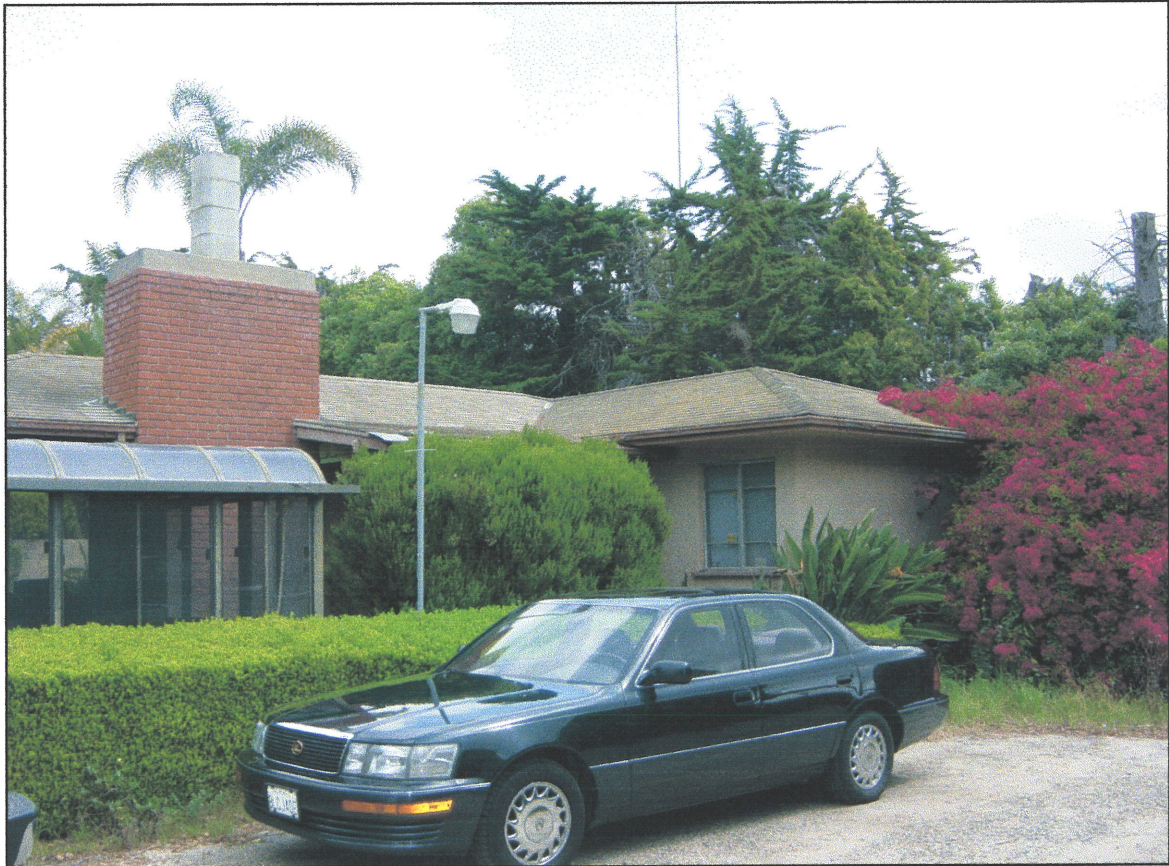


Figure 34. South elevation of the house with front entrance in the center (not visible), girls' bedroom to the right, and sunroom to the left. The roof has asphalt shingles, and the chimney has been raised 32 inches.



Figure 35. Front entrance on the south elevation of the house with open front door. Beyond the entry hall is the patio. Note the two-level fascia gutter system.



Figure 36. Front entrance on the south elevation of the house.



Figure 37. Close-up of front door on the south elevation of the house.



Figure 38. Corner of the west and south elevations of the house (southwest corner of sunroom).



Figure 39. West elevation of the house showing the exterior bay window of the dining room and the protruding window of the kitchen.



**Figure 40. North elevation of the west wing
looking toward the service porch.**



Figure 41. Standing on the patio looking toward the east wall of the west wing. Door to the service porch visible on the right and the kitchen bay window on the left. Barbeque has crank with chain control of the grill above the coals.



Figure 42. Detail of barbeque crank and chain with gravity cog.



Figure 43. Standing on the patio looking toward the north elevation of the central portion of the house. Note flagstone planter in front of living room window. Door on left opens to entry hall (see Figure 29). The patio is made from multicolored flagstone set in cement mortar, with ~2-foot-wide joints. The chimney extension is visible on the roof to the right of center.



**Figure 44. Same view of the patio taken from slightly farther back.
Note freestanding planter in left foreground.**



**Figure 45. North entrance to the patio between two low brick walls and landscaping.
Door on the right is to the service porch.**



Figure 46. Corner of north and east elevations of the house (northeast corner of master bedroom). Vents near the ground are for underfloor space.



Figure 47. East elevation of the house showing the windows to the boys' bedroom on the left and the glass-block wall and window above the toilet of the girls' bathroom to the right.



Figure 48. Southeast corner of the house. Overgrown bougainvillea covers the exterior wall of the girls' bedroom. Palms behind the house to the north surround the pool area.



**Figure 49. Front entrance on the south elevation of the house.
Note the 4-by-4-inch column with an "X" pattern in the railing.
The entry has three brick riser stairs. The underhang of the eaves is stuccoed.**



Figure 50. Entry drive south of the house, looking east. Sunroom visible to the left.



Figure 51. BBQ house (right) and dressing rooms (left). View to the northeast.



Figure 52. BBQ house, dressing rooms, and pool, looking north.



Figure 53. Wall west of the pool, looking northwest.



Figure 54. Interior of the BBQ house looking northeast. The brick barbeque is about 6 feet wide with a metal hood. The beams are painted, and the decking is sealed with a natural stain. Infill is 8-by-8-by-16-inch Cement Masonry Units.



**Figure 55. Interior of the BBQ house, looking southeast.
The ceiling is about 6 feet 4 inches at the low end.**



Figure 56. Looking north from under the overhang of the BBQ house toward the adjacent dressing rooms. Note brick planter in foreground.



Figure 57. Looking south from the pool toward the north elevation of the house through the patio.

**Historical Photographs of
Robert Pfeiler Farmhouse**



Figure H1. Aerial overview of farmhouse (upper left) soon after construction (ca. 1949) and prior to construction of pool (1952–1953), looking south. Farmhouse was built on the site of the original Maulhardt barn, which was demolished prior to September 1948. Apparently some elements of the barn’s foundation were incorporated into the new farmhouse, or the farmhouse may have been simply located within the barn’s footprint.



Figure H2. Farmhouse foundation under construction, looking south, dated September 1, 1948.



Figure H3. Farmhouse foundation under construction, September 1948, looking north.
Left to right, David Pfeiler standing where the kitchen would be, and Susan Pfeiler Brown and Judith Pfeiler Yoakum standing where the living room would be.



Figure H4. Farmhouse foundation under construction, looking south, dated September 7, 1948.

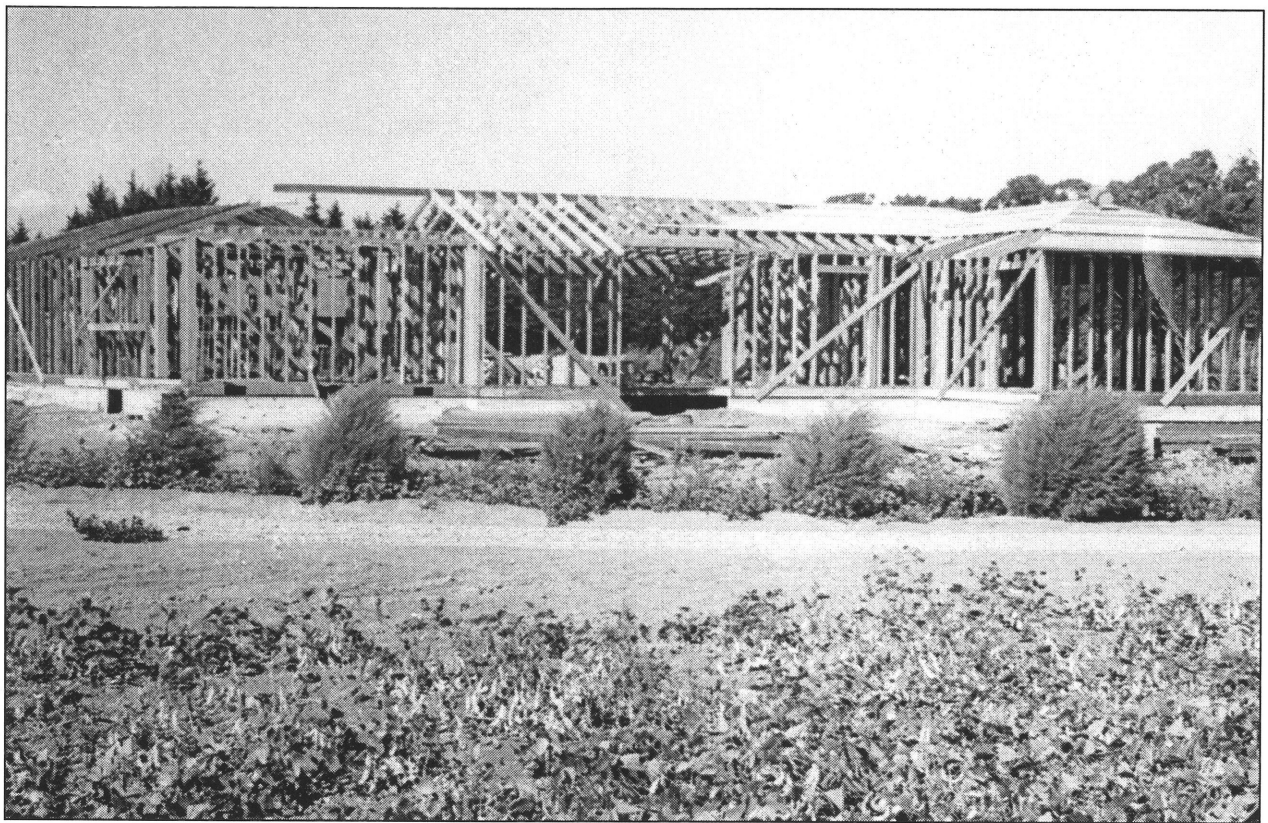


Figure H5. Framing for the farmhouse takes shape, looking north. Chimney will be placed in the opening in the middle of the photograph.



Figure H6. South elevation, ca. October 1948, looking north. The chimney has been completed, and installation of roofing and insulation are underway.

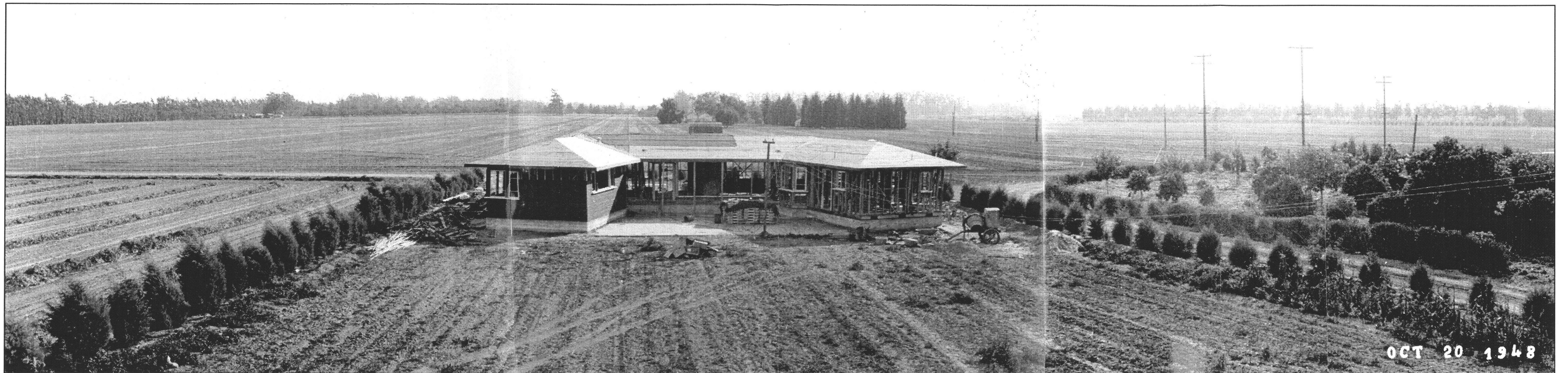


Figure H7. North elevation, looking south, dated October 20, 1948. Insulation has been installed on the east wing of the house.



Figure H8. The farmhouse nears completion, looking south, ca. January 1949.

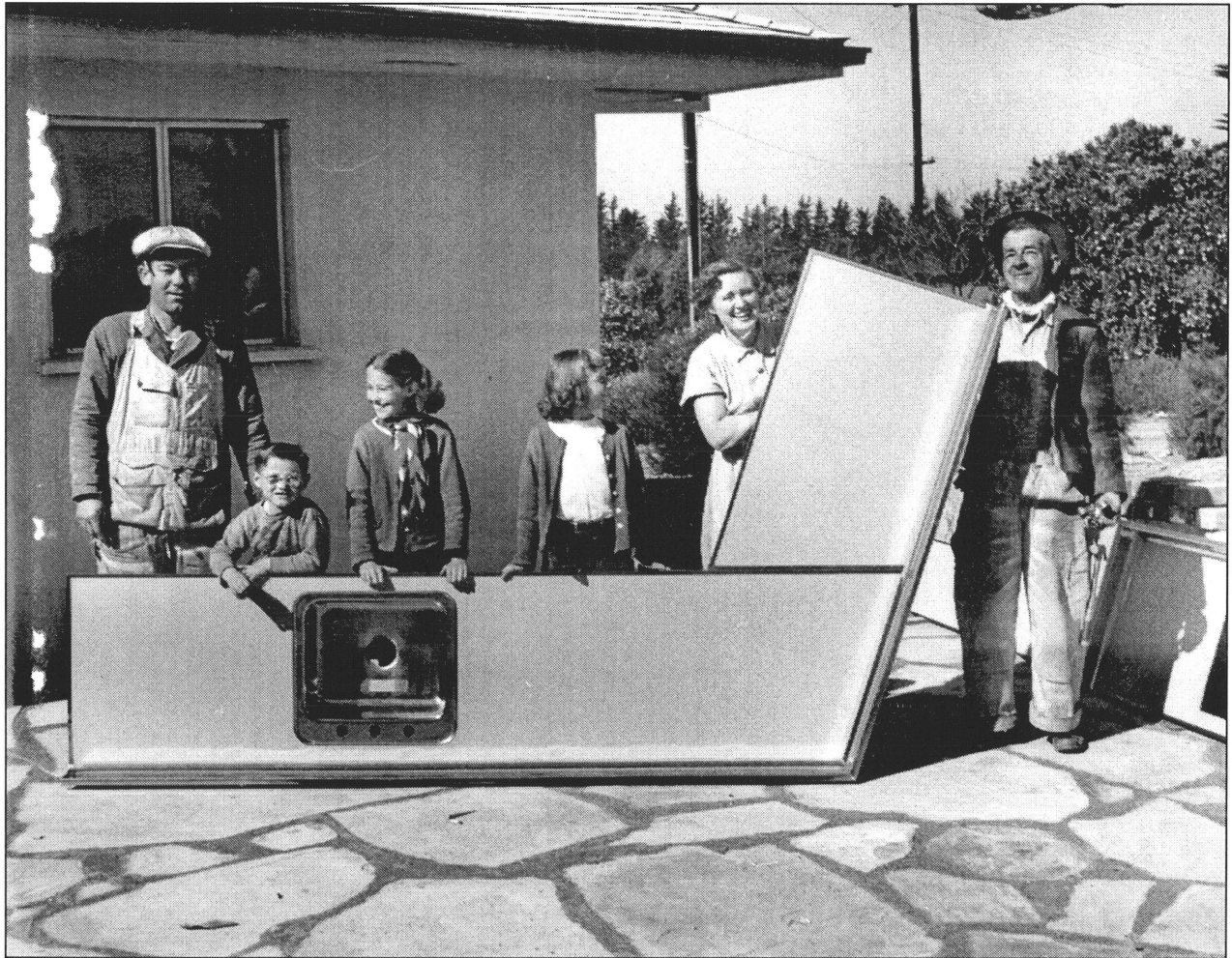
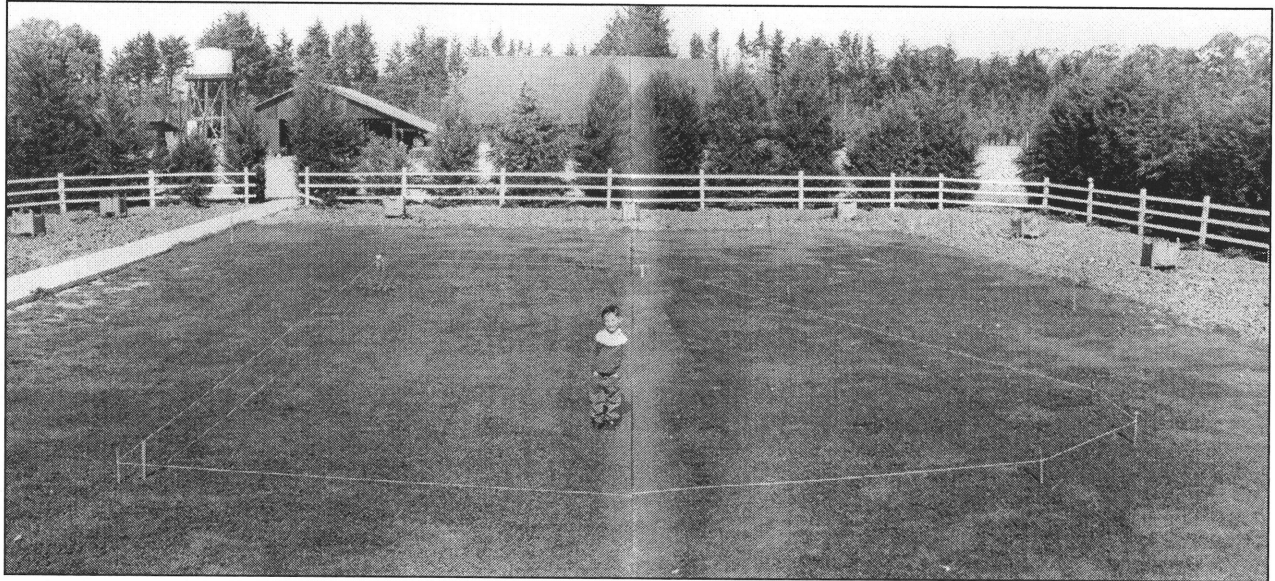


Figure H9. Kitchen counter ready to be installed. Left to right, unidentified workman, three of the five Pfeiler children (David Pfeiler, Judith Pfeiler Yoakum, and Susan Pfeiler Brown), Robert Pfeiler's wife (Margaret Elizabeth "Betty" Pfeiler), and an unidentified workman.



**Figure H10. Pool site north of the farmhouse, looking north.
Pool and outbuildings were built in 1952–1953.**



Figure H11. Excavating for pool, looking north.

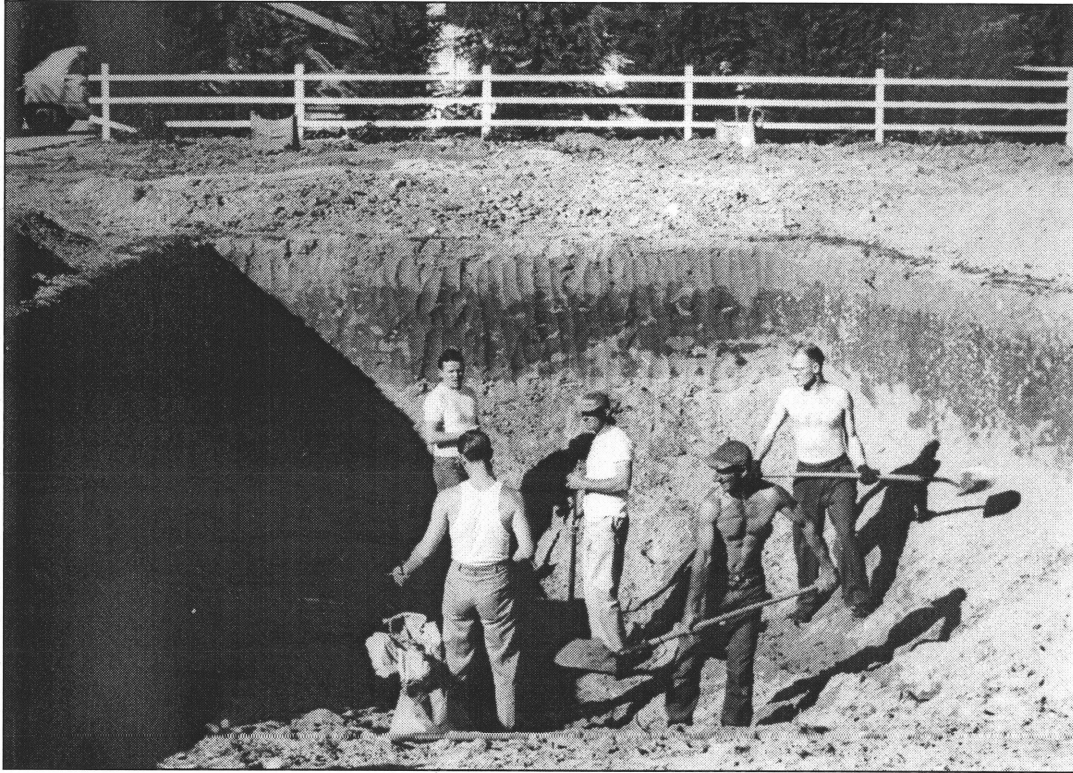


Figure H12. Excavating for pool, looking north.

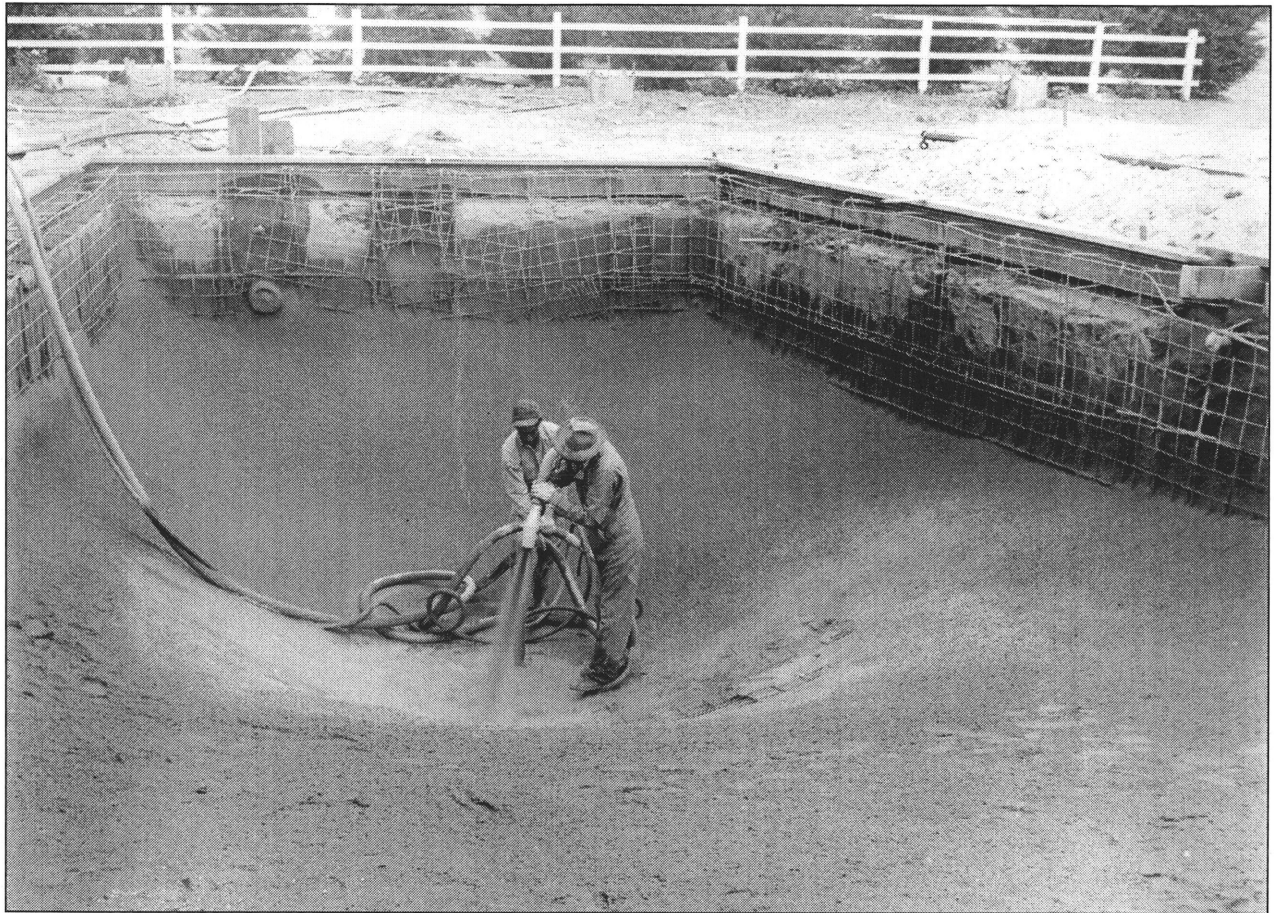
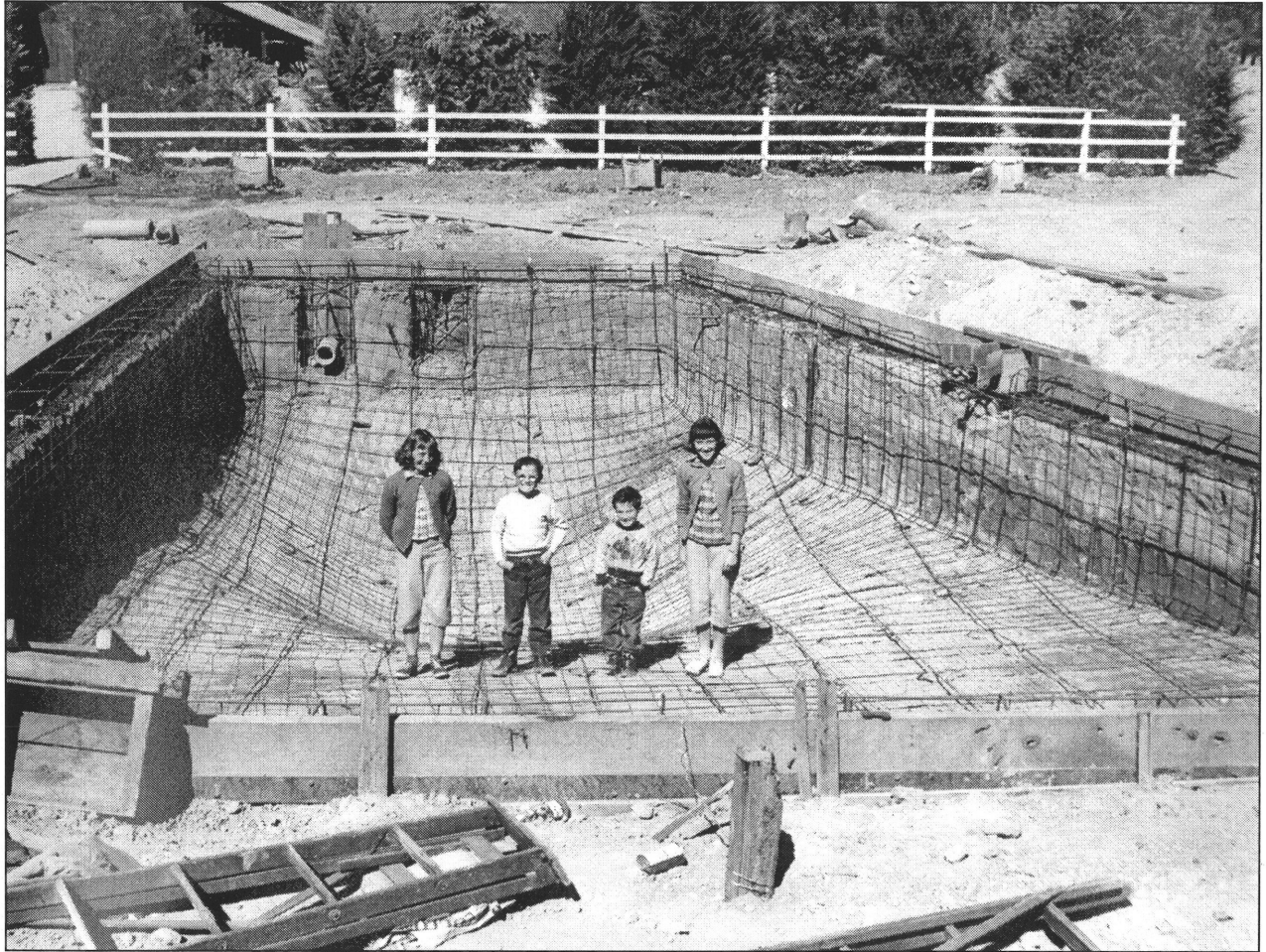


Figure H13. Preparing pool site for pouring concrete, looking north.



**Figure H14. Pool site ready for concrete to be poured, looking north.
Left to right, Susan Pfeiler Brown, David Pfeiler, Douglas Pfeiler, and Judith Pfeiler Yoakum.**

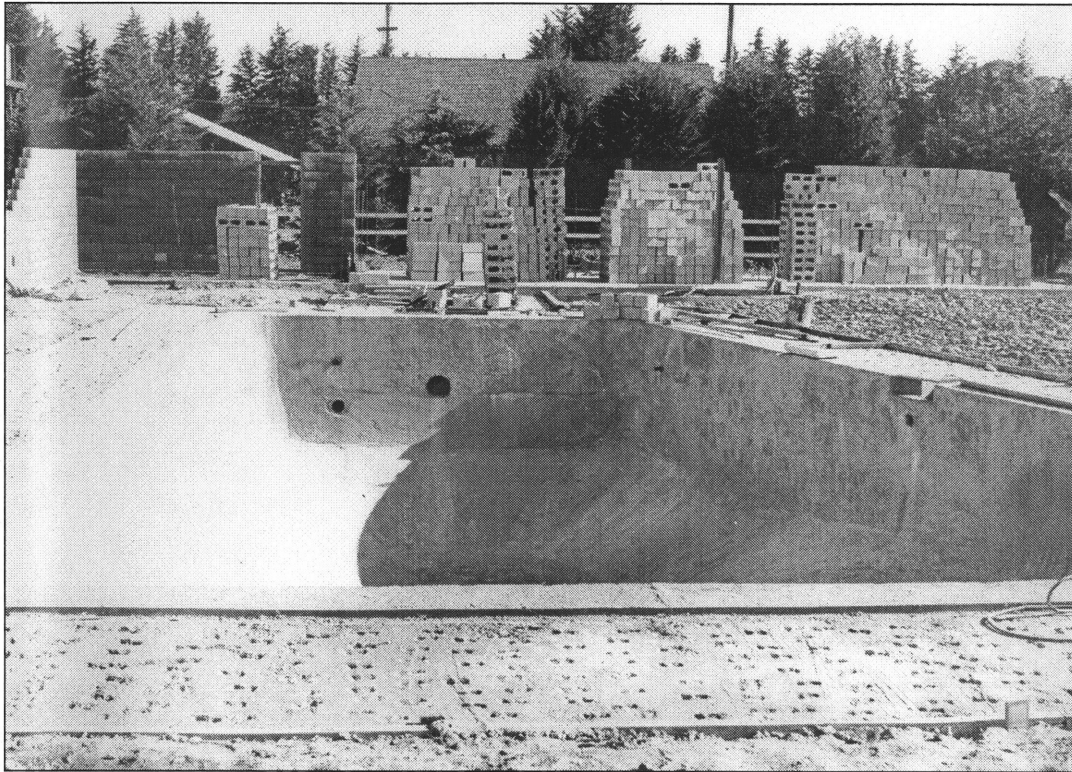


Figure H15. Concrete has been poured for pool, concrete masonry units (CMU) in background to be used for outbuilding construction, looking north.



**Figure H16. Applying pool's finished surface, looking north.
Note outbuildings to the east and north under construction.**

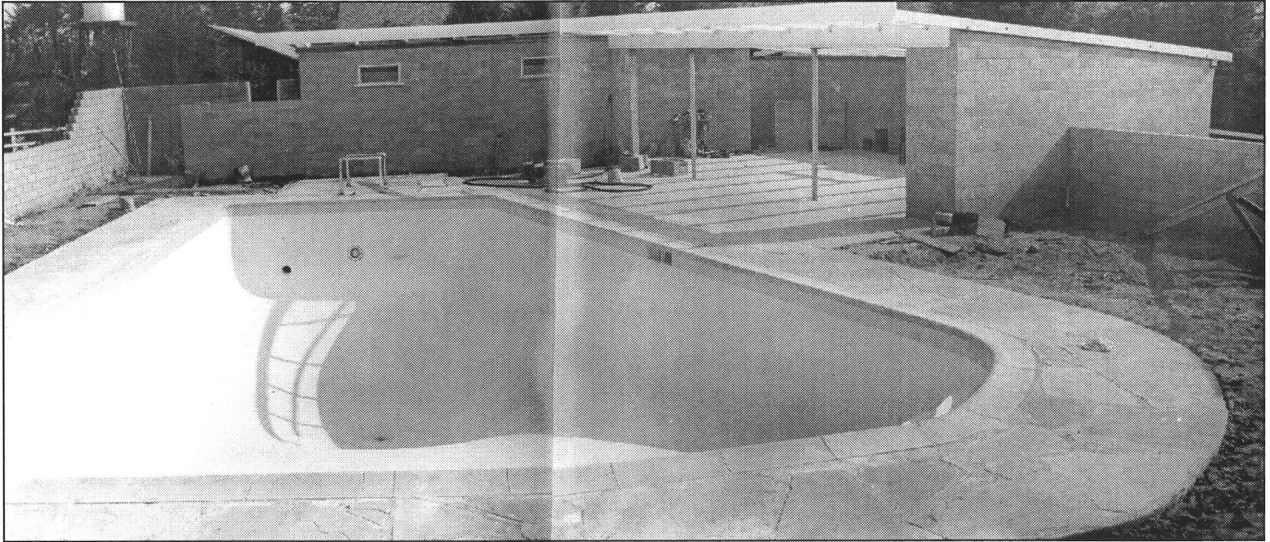


Figure H17. Completed pool and outbuildings, looking north.