

## 6 Oakmont Road

This unique house was built in 1933 by Wheeling Corrugating, a division of Wheeling Steel. The depression-era experimental building was constructed to determine the feasibility of the company's entering the prefabricated housing market. Although the proof-of-concept was a success, the timing was bad, and the boxy appearance apparently wasn't appealing to the housing market at that time. It appears that this was the only house built by Wheeling Corrugating.



However, the architect on the project, Cleveland, Ohio-based Charles Bacon Rowley, designed a similar "Armco Ferro Enamel" house that was part of the "House of Tomorrow" exhibit at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. Eleven designs were featured at that fair, and five of those futuristic homes were later moved to locations along Lake Michigan, where they still stand today, surrounded by the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

E.D. Pierre was the engineer in charge of construction of the Wheeling house. A description of his work states, "The foundations are masonry, the floors are wood over a steel deck, and the interior walls are plastered on steel lath. Practically all other components, including framing, pipes, plumbing, lath, and ceilings are steel. All of the parts were fabricated at the factory and assembled on site. Exterior walls are rolled steel plates, covered with porcelain enamel." (*Buildings of West Virginia*, p. 366)

Modern features that were displayed during a public open house in early 1934 included "steel cabinets and range," with the kitchen items "manufactured from sheet steel supplied by the Wheeling Steel Corporation." (*Wheeling Intelligencer*, January 22, 1934.)

An article in the *Pittsburgh Press* in the fall of 1934 featured six different futuristic home styles, including the Wheeling house. The article pointed out futuristic amenities such as "the multitude of electrical devices already perfected and still being developed to give the homeowner and the housewife the equivalent of some 800 servants." Although this house has a half basement and a crawl space under the rest of the house, the article pointed out that most of these futuristic homes had no cellar, because "the heating unit takes up practically no space and families no longer store huge supplies of meat and vegetables in the basement for snow-bound winter months." (*Pittsburgh Press*, October 22, 1934) It was also pointed out that the flat roof space could be used as a penthouse or family playground.

The prices of these modern houses were expected to be affordable, ranging from as low as \$2,000, with "the biggest field in the range from \$5,000 to \$10,000." [In today's money, those prices would have ranged from about \$39,000 to nearly \$200,000.] These reasonable prices were expected to help fill a home shortage of an estimated five million new homes at that time. And,

families who owned the houses built on slabs could “merely lease the land where their homes stood and easily pick up their house and move from neighborhood to neighborhood.”

In 1944, Wheeling Corrugating sold the property to Mary S. and Maxwell Pellish (1899-1994). Pellish was a mining equipment salesman around that time. The deed required that the property remain residential and that it could be sold to “no one but a member of the Caucasian Race.”

(Lillian) Pearl Sanker (1894-1971), the widow of Grover C. Sanker, purchased the property in 1947 when the Pellishes moved to California. She sold it in 1961 to William A. and Theresa G. Widmer, and for decades it remained in the Widmer family, passing next to Sonja L. and William A. Widmer, Jr. in 2001. Ted and Mildred Maxwell were the next owners.

Although the far-reaching dreams of the original builders never reached fruition, the fact that this experimental home pre-dated the more well-known, single story “Lustron” houses by more than a decade is particularly remarkable.



Prepared by Jeanne Finstein, Friends of Wheeling  
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#### Sources:

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- Chambers, S. Allen, *Buildings of West Virginia*
- Find-a-Grave
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- Ohio County Deed Records
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- *Wheeling Intelligencer*