The Noel and Isabel Buckner

Papers, 1941-2003
1.5 linear ft.

Acquisition Number: 2013-12

Acquisition: The architectural drawings and documents were donated by Elizabeth Buckner; the photographic materials by Noel Buckner.

Access: Access to the collection is unrestricted.

Copyright: Copyright to this collection is held by the Cranbrook Educational Community.

Preferred Citation: Noel and Isabel Buckner Papers, Cranbrook Archives, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

Architectural Drawings: Cataloged on Horizon (Series 15) and stored with the architectural drawings.

Audio/Visual Materials: A CD of historic photographic images is housed with the CD collection.

Processing: Leslie S. Edwards, February 2015
History

This collection documents a residence that was recently demolished. Designed by architect Robert Harter Snyder in 1955, the Buckner residence was a prime example of mid-century modern architecture in Michigan. Snyder, who was Head of the Architecture Department at the time, was commissioned by a former Kingswood School graduate (Isabel Wolfner Buckner) and her husband, Noel, to design a modernist residence for them on Walnut Lake at 2633 Cove Lane, West Bloomfield Township. The Buckners, who were friends with several Academy of Art artists, also commissioned Wallace Mitchell to design a rug for the new home. This collection will help document the work of Robert Snyder, which is currently only minimally represented in Cranbrook collections.

Robert H. Snyder received a bachelor’s degree from Syracuse University’s School of Architecture in 1941, and worked at Albert Kahn Associates (1941-1943), among other firms, prior to service in the Navy during World War II. From 1948 to 1950, he attended Cranbrook Academy of Art, receiving a Master’s Degree in Architecture and Urban Design. Shortly after the death of Eliel Saarinen in July 1950, Snyder was appointed instructor of the Architecture Department. During this time he was also employed by Saarinen, Saarinen and Associates as a project manager (1949-1951). Snyder was appointed Head of the Architecture Department in 1951.

The work of Snyder’s architectural firm, Robert Harter Snyder Associates, included consultation with Ford Motor Company on a master plan for Dearborn (1952), collaboration with Eero Saarinen and Alexander Girard on a summer home in northern Canada (1951-1953), and with Girard on a furniture exhibition for Herman Miller (1952). His early work included residential, ecclesiastical and public buildings, including the East Detroit (now Eastpointe) Public Library (1953), the Buckner residence (1955), the addition for Owosso’s First Congregational Church (1958), and Episcopal churches in Gaylord, Grayling (1962), and Toledo (1963).

While at Cranbrook, Snyder was an outspoken critic of the federal Urban Renewal Program, advocating for smaller-sized cities. In 1961 he presented a plan to decentralize cities to the U.S. House Committee on Housing and Urban Renewal. From 1962-1965 Snyder was commissioned by the Cranbrook Foundation to develop a Master Plan Study of the Cranbrook campus, and a national Center for Advanced Studies of Environment and Architecture, which was co-sponsored by the American Institute of Architects and the American Institute of Planners.
Scope and Content of Collection

The bulk of the collection consists of Steele’s sketchbooks. For ease of retrieval, the sketchbooks are housed together in Box 2, with two oversized sketchbooks in Box 3.

All other manuscript materials (with the exception of oversized) are arranged alphabetically in Box 1. The biographical folder mainly consists of secondary source materials compiled by Steele’s family.
Box Number--Description

Box 1

1. Biographical
2. Correspondence, 1942-1959
4. Exhibition Catalogs, 1950-1959