

**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.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Blevins, Charles and Bertha, House

Other names/site number: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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

## 2. Location

Street & number: 1838 North Norfolk Avenue

City or town: Tulsa State: Oklahoma County: Tulsa

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

## 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

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A    B    C    D

<div style="border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span><b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b></span> <span><b>Date</b></span> </div> </div> <div style="border-top: 1px solid black;"> <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b> </div>	
<p>In my opinion, the property <u>  </u> meets <u>  </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.</p> <div style="border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 20px;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span><b>Signature of commenting official:</b></span> <span><b>Date</b></span> </div> </div> <div style="border-top: 1px solid black; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span><b>Title :</b></span> <span><b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></span> </div> </div>	

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#### 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:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 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 ☐

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/  
Bungalow/Craftsman

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

The Charles and Bertha Blevins House at 1838 N. Norfolk Avenue in Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma is a one-story, Craftsman/Bungalow-style residence. The neighborhood is a mix of early twentieth century homes and late twentieth/early twenty first century infills. The one-story house has a full basement, which is rare for this part of Tulsa. The house was constructed for Charles (Charlie) and Bertha Blevins around 1944. At this time, Charlie owned and operated the Blevins Hotel at 310 N. Greenwood. The couple opened their home to the Tulsa County election board for use as a polling place between 1945 and 1962, thus contributing to civil rights efforts to increase African American voting in Tulsa. The house also served as a community gathering place and foster home. The modest house retains a high level of integrity to convey significance. The majority of exterior alterations are related to the building's continued maintenance. The current owner removed a non-historic rear addition and re-opened the historic basement entrance. The interior layout and details have minimal changes. Because the building retains a high level of integrity, it is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage/Black and Social History/Civil Rights.

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## Narrative Description

### SITE

The Charles and Bertha Blevins House is in the Middleton Addition on Lots 16-17 in Block 1. The mailing address is 1838 North Norfolk Avenue. The block is bordered by the intersection of East Seminole Place and North Norfolk Avenue to the south and the intersection of East Ute Street and North Norfolk Avenue to the north. The lot to the south of the Blevins House is currently undeveloped.<sup>1</sup> The neighborhood is a mix of old and new construction with undeveloped lots interspersed. The neighborhood dates to the early twentieth century and sits several blocks north of East Pine Street, the historic north boundary of the Greenwood community in Tulsa. Many of the older homes and empty lots have been or are being replaced with new residential construction. Most of the older homes are altered Bungalow- or vernacular-style dwellings of frame construction. Recent infill residential construction typically has a brick exterior with attached garage.

### EAST FAÇADE

The Blevins House is a one-story (plus basement) dwelling with a red brick exterior. The brick is laid up in an American (common) bond. The house has a low-pitched, cross-gabled roof clad in asphalt shingles with a dormer set behind the front gable. The front features a full-width porch that wraps around one-quarter of the south side of the house. (Photo 0001) The porch has a concrete floor and brick foundation. The south end of the porch is uncovered. The remainder of the porch is covered by a front gabled roof. The gable is clad in painted, horizontal wood siding. An octagon attic vent is centered on the gable. The porch roof is supported by three square brick piers of varied height with square wood posts. Another brick pier anchors the south end of the porch. The north end of the porch features three brick steps with a metal handrail in the center of the stairs.

The front door is centered along the east façade. An inner paneled wood door is protected by a wood frame glass door. A set of three hung, 1/1 windows with wood frames flank each side of the door. Wood mullions separate each window. Each set of windows share a continuous concrete sill. The windows are arranged symmetrically on either side of the doorway.

### SOUTH ELEVATION

The south elevation features a low-pitched gable along the center of the façade roof line with an octagon attic vent in the center (Photos 0003, 0005). The red American bond brick continues along this elevation. There is a two-panel wood door at the east end of the elevation, above the uncovered section of the front porch that wraps from the east side to the south end. Seven hung,

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<sup>1</sup> Aerial photographs indicate a building on this lot until c. 2003.

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1/1 windows with wood frames are to the left (west) of the door. All except one are in pairs. The fenestration is equally spaced along the façade. The windows have concrete sills.

At ground level along the elevation are four window wells that have been infilled with concrete. Each well surrounds a basement hopper window. Although in poor condition, the hopper windows remain extant when viewed from the interior.

## **WEST ELEVATION**

The west (back) elevation features a wood panel door with metal screen near the center (Photo 0004). Four concrete steps flanked by wood railings lead to the door. South (right) of the door is a pair of hung, 1/1 wood frame windows. The windows are separated by a wood mullion and share a concrete sill. North (left) of the door is a hung, 1/1 aluminum frame window with a concrete sill. This window is boarded from the interior. The outline of a removed, non-historic addition that framed the door and north window is still visible. The gable above is clad in horizontal wood siding and has an octagon attic vent.

## **NORTH ELEVATION**

The north side elevation features a low-pitched cross gable roof at the east end (Photo 0002). A soldier course runs just beneath the gable. A brick chimney with a decorative bond pattern is set near the east end of the elevation. A window flanks each side of the chimney. Each is a hung, 1/1 wood frame window with a concrete sill. Remaining windows are evenly arranged along the rest of the elevation. There is a pair of hung, 1/1 wood frame windows near the center of the elevation. The windows are separated by a wood mullion and share a concrete sill. The remaining two windows to the west are slightly smaller in dimension. Each is a hung, 1/1 wood frame window with a concrete sill.

A concrete stairwell accessing the basement is set below the center, paired windows. Above grade, the stairwell is obscured by painted wood panels. Below grade, the stairwell is bounded by concrete (Photo 0006). A metal slab door is at the bottom of the stairwell. To the right (west) of the stairwell are two basement window openings, each containing a hopper unit. One of the openings has been infilled with concrete.

## **INTERIOR**

The main floor of the house contains nine rooms. Upon entering the home from the east (main) entrance, one enters the large living area that retains crown molding and baseboards around the plaster walls. The south end of the living room has one door that leads into a bedroom. The north end of the living room features a fireplace with a mantel and tile surround (Photo 0009). The north end of the living room flows west into another sitting room through an arched opening. Continuing through the center hallway are seven other rooms, including one bathroom with period tilework, a small utility room that provides interior access to the basement, and the

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kitchen at the rear of the house. Painted wood crown molding and baseboards are found throughout the house. Window openings throughout the house also feature wood trim.

The basement has a cement floor and painted plaster walls (Photo 0010). Although in poor condition due to water damage, the eastern half of the basement, which housed a polling place for local elections, retains a painted wood ceiling with the joists supporting the main floor above cased in wood trim. A metal slab door, accessing the exterior stairwell, is set near basement's northeast corner. Two wood-framed hopper windows are to the left of the door. The south basement wall retains three hopper windows. Remnants of period light fixtures are fixed to the basement ceiling.

## INTEGRITY

The Charles and Bertha Blevins House exhibits strong integrity to convey the property's ethnic and social significance. The house remains in its original location. Although integrity of setting has changed somewhat with infill residential construction replacing previous dwellings, property boundaries and building setbacks remain consistent as they did historically. Further, the subdivision remains a primarily African American neighborhood. Integrity of setting has also diminished due to the removal of a garage/apartment at the rear of the property by the City of Tulsa sometime after 1995. According to the current property owner, Charles and Bertha Blevins lived in the apartment while the main house was under construction. Renting out the apartment likely provided an additional stream of income for the couple.

The current owner has made some changes to the current house for purposes of maintenance. Such work included removing a non-historic addition from the rear of the house, removal of non-historic siding in the gables, and re-opening access to the basement, which had been closed off by a previous owner. The current, square wood post porch supports were installed sometime in the early 2000s, as the historic, tapered wood porch supports had rotted (see Figure 1). The existing 1/1 hung windows were installed at an unknown date, replacing 3/1 hung units in their original openings. In 2007, to add structural stability, the current owner enclosed the living room's south side door opening from the interior but kept the exterior door fixed in place.

Despite such changes, the house retains its historic form, floor plan, and fenestration pattern, which allows it to convey its historic function as a single-family residence. Further, although in poor condition due to water damage, the basement where the Blevins hosted a polling place and various community functions remains intact. The basement retains its historic volume and remnants of its historic finishes. Overall, the house retains sufficient integrity to convey the Blevins family's use of the house as a residence as well as a center for community activity, including voting, thus illustrating the efforts among Black citizens in North Tulsa to push for greater equality during the mid-twentieth century.

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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.

### Criteria Considerations

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

- ☐ 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



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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Ethnic Heritage/Black  
Social History/Civil Rights

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1945-1962

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Charles and Bertha Blevins House at 1838 North Norfolk Avenue in Tulsa is locally significant under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage/Black and Social History/Civil Rights for embodying efforts among Black Tulsans to promote voter registration and participation in Oklahoma's elections prior to passage of the 1964 federal Civil Rights Act. Involvement in local civic and political organizations by the house's owners, Charles and Bertha Blevins, contributed to the economic and social development of the Black community in North Tulsa during the mid-twentieth century. Most notably, the house served as a polling place for nearby residents, making voting more accessible and secure for Black Tulsans. The house is also important for hosting social gatherings and events, thus boosting community development and pride. The period of significance for the property extends from 1945, when the house first served as a polling place, until 1962, the final year in which the house served as a polling place.

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

## HISTORIC CONTEXT

### *African Americans in Oklahoma*

African Americans entered Oklahoma long before statehood. Many came as either slaves of relocated American Indians or during territorial days as freedmen looking for a better life. Promoters such as Edwin McCabe offered land in the new territory of Oklahoma to formerly enslaved people in the South. These freedmen, looking for safety and better opportunities, fled the segregation and lynching of the South. Before statehood, African Americans living in Oklahoma Territory found some safety, opportunities, and equality. In 1907, Oklahoma became a state. During the state's constitutional convention, the State Legislature adopted bills that segregated Oklahoma's society and legalized Jim Crow laws.<sup>2</sup> By 1930, Black citizens represented 7.4% of the state's population.<sup>3</sup>

Many African Americans moved to the booming oil town of Tulsa for its economic opportunities. Due to the discovery of oil, the city's population more than tripled between 1910 and 1920. African Americans made up over 10,000 of those residents. The booming town offered financial opportunities as well as land. Before statehood, O.W. Gurley and J. B. Stradford, both African Americans, purchased large tracts of land north of downtown Tulsa. They sold the land to Blacks only. Other developers bought and invested in land and resold it to

<sup>2</sup> Charles River Editors, *Black Wall Street: The History of Greenwood District Before the Tulsa Race Riot*, (NO Place, No date), 10; Joel Edward Baehler, "Organizing the "Living Dead": Civil Rights in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1954-1964, (M.A. Thesis. Oklahoma State University. 2012), 20.

<sup>3</sup> David Baird and Danney Goble, *Oklahoma: A History*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011): 269; Jimmie Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982): 83-85

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Blacks only. This development process segregated Blacks from whites north of the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad. Despite segregation, Blacks developed a thriving community known as Greenwood. By 1911, Greenwood boasted five churches, three lawyers, and two doctors. By the 1920s, the business community became known as the "black wall street."<sup>4</sup>

Segregation and racial tensions in the growing city exploded in the spring of 1921. On May 31, 1921, Tulsa newspapers reported the story of a young black man allegedly assaulting a young white woman in the elevator of a downtown Tulsa building. The next day, mobs gathered around the courthouse. The sheriff locked the alleged assailant, Dick Rowland, in the county jail. Whites wanted justice at the end of a rope. Blacks gathered, hoping to protect the young man, and also wanted justice.<sup>5</sup> Over two days, violence and fires swept through Greenwood. By the end of the night of June 1, 1921, the area lay devastated. Fires destroyed more than 1,000 Black homes and destroyed a thirty-four-block area. In addition, several hundred Black Tulsans lost their lives.<sup>6</sup>

### *Civil Rights in Oklahoma*

Despite Oklahoma Territory holding out the promise of freedom from racial inequality and discrimination, African Americans fought for civil rights early on during the creation of the state. Voting was the key to changing the status quo and defeating Jim Crow as the state legislature immediately sought to limit Black enfranchisement. The legislature added a grandfather clause to the state constitution in 1910 that restricted voting only to those whose grandfathers had voting privileges before 1866, thus eliminating African Americans from voting.<sup>7</sup> In 1915, the Supreme Court ruled the grandfather clause as unconstitutional.<sup>8</sup> However, Oklahoma found a way to circumvent the ruling. Those who had not registered in the general election before the Supreme Court ruling were required to register to vote within a twelve-day window to be able to vote in the future. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that this statute violated the Fourteenth Amendment in 1939.<sup>9</sup>

The 1940s and 1950s brought a more significant push for civil rights not just in the Deep South but in Oklahoma as well. Roscoe Dunjee, the editor of a Black newspaper in Oklahoma City, brought the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to Oklahoma. Their chief legal counsel, Thurgood Marshall, visited the state to discuss the issue of desegregation.<sup>10</sup> African Americans began challenging racial inequalities in Oklahoma City by the late 1950s, when an educator named Clara Luper organized sit-ins at local restaurants.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Baird, "Oklahoma," 213-214; Randy Krehbiel, *Tulsa 1921: Reporting a Massacre*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 23, 14, 5; Hannibal B. Johnson, *Black Wall Street 100: An American City Grapples with Its Historical Racial Trauma*, (Fort Worth, TX: Eakin Press, 2020), 29.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, "Black Wall," 46; Baird, "Oklahoma," 214.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, "Black Wall," 49; Hannibal B. Johnson, *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance In Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District*, (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1998), 29.

<sup>7</sup> Krehbiel, "Tulsa," 26; Baehler, "Organizing," 20.

<sup>8</sup> Krehbiel, "Tulsa," 26.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, "From Riot," 109-110; Krehbiel, "Tulsa," 26.

<sup>10</sup> Baehler, "Organizing," 26.

<sup>11</sup> Baehler, "Organizing," 54.

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### *Civil Rights in Tulsa*

With its history of violence, African Americans in Tulsa moved cautiously to push for civil rights. In the 1950s, the NAACP began working with Tulsa churches to make for equality in the city once called the most segregated in America. Although Greenwood revived itself in the aftermath of the Tulsa Race Massacre, Blacks in Tulsa still faced challenges. After the massacre, many struggled to rebuild because insurance companies refused to pay for the losses. Even after the tragedy, Tulsans relegated African Americans to the north side of Tulsa. Poverty levels in Tulsa remained higher than in Oklahoma City, and the earning potential was lower among the Black population. The housing market in Tulsa became virtually non-existent and limited to North Tulsa.<sup>12</sup> Open acreage and newer subdivisions north of Greenwood became desirable areas to live. Lots sold, and new residents slowly began building homes.

African American leaders agreed that voting was the best solution for achieving civil rights. The Prince Hall Masons, a fraternal organization, encouraged social participation and service in Tulsa's Black community, as did the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce and the National Urban League.<sup>13</sup> However, Black voters in Tulsa were not numerous enough to influence local politics and policy. Although the NAACP and the National Urban League worked to increase voter registration and turnout, only ten percent of Oklahoma's Black population was registered and voted in elections by 1954.<sup>14</sup> Black leaders in the state aspired to get at least fifty percent of black voters registered and participating in elections.<sup>15</sup>

Although national organizations such as the NAACP and National Urban League actively encouraged voting and registration, everyday locals advanced such efforts at the municipal and state levels. Tulsa's African American newspaper, *The Oklahoma Eagle*, published editorials and articles urging voting and registration. The paper's editors often carried articles comparing candidates and encouraging the support of candidates who appeared or acted as allies to the black community.<sup>16</sup> In March 1952, to increase Black voter participation, the Housewives League set up booths in front of *The Oklahoma Eagle* office to register voters. In an article in *The Oklahoma Eagle*, the group pointed out to leaders that voter registration and participation were low, and to effect change, the numbers needed to be higher. Local churches such as Vernon AME Church (NRIS #100002547) and First Baptist Church North Tulsa encouraged voter registration and election participation.<sup>17</sup> In 1951, Vernon AME hosted the state conference of the NAACP.<sup>18</sup> The NAACP held meetings in private homes. With permission of the county election board, the Colored Voters of America worked to get Black residents in Tulsa registered by setting up registration tables in the community.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, "From Riot," 111; Baehler, "Organizing," 85, 87.

<sup>13</sup> Baehler, "Organizing," 88.

<sup>14</sup> Baehler, "Organizing," 88; Khreibel, "Tulsa," 26.

<sup>15</sup> Baehler, "organizing," 38.

<sup>16</sup> *The Oklahoma Eagle*. Tulsa, Oklahoma 1944-1960.

<sup>17</sup> "Hats off to Housewives League," *The Oklahoma Eagle*. March 13, 1952, pg 2.

<sup>18</sup> "State Conference of the NAACP today at Vernon," *The Oklahoma Eagle*. November 15, 1951, pg 1.

<sup>19</sup> Princetta Newman. Interview by Cheronda Fritz Ballard. July 25, 2023. Tulsa, Oklahoma.

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By 1958, local civil rights leaders still struggled to get a large voting block of Black voters. To increase voting among African Americans, the Tulsa Ministerial Alliance (an alliance of Black churches) held a voter registration drive at the all-Black Booker T. Washington High School. *The Oklahoma Eagle* pleaded with African American residents to vote in city elections to effect change. One Black commentator wrote, "A people are free only so long as they are factors in determining what shall be the character of the government."<sup>20</sup> Black voter registration remained low despite the pleadings of the newspaper editor, editorials, and registration drives.

Young people led the charge on civil rights in Tulsa as they did in other parts of the country in the 1950s and 1960s. By 1959, Black youth in Tulsa sent out what they called "personal evangelists" to register Black voters in the city. These young people volunteered to scour the city and personally register Black Tulsans to vote. Unlike Oklahoma City, however, the youth and other organizations in Tulsa did not organize many direct protests or sit-ins, which may have come from fears of racial violence. In the summer of 1960, Martin Luther King, Jr., traveled to Tulsa to speak about civil rights at First Baptist Church North Tulsa. Emboldened by the actions in Oklahoma City and other parts of the country, African Americans in Tulsa tried to petition the city to end segregation in public places in 1963. In 1964, Black youth in Tulsa led a freedom parade and several demonstrations, including sit-ins at the Apache Circle Diner and Borden's Cafeteria, the latter of which saw Clara Luper travel from Oklahoma City.<sup>21</sup>

## CRITERION A: ETHNIC HERITAGE/BLACK AND SOCIAL HISTORY/CIVIL RIGHTS

### *1838 North Norfolk Avenue*

The property at 1838 North Norfolk Avenue reflects a desire to rebuild in the wake of the Tulsa Race Massacre and push for civil rights. The land was originally part of a Cherokee reservation allotment. In 1915, the federal government allotted seventy acres of Section 25, Township 12 North, Range 12 East to Lieura Norma Kinnison, a newborn Cherokee. Virgil Kinnison, Lieura's father and guardian, leased for one dollar the oil and gas rights for the property to the Missouri Mining Company. Finding no oil or gas on the property, the company sold their interests to A. F. Ault and W. E. Ross.<sup>22</sup>

With Tulsa growing and more African Americans moving there to enjoy its economic prosperity, it was only a short time before a developer sought to improve the property. In 1917, Virgil Kinnison sold the allotment to Ralph Johnson for \$2,500. Johnson subsequently surveyed and platted a new subdivision named the Middleton Addition. In 1919, the property changed hands again. A real estate company, Berry Hart, purchased the subdivision and sold lots. In October 1919, Nancy Wingfield purchased Lots 16 and 17 in the Middleton Addition, the future location of the Charles and Bertha Blevins House, for \$1,000.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Baehler, "Organizing," 89-90.

<sup>21</sup> Baehler, "Organizing," 94, 99-100.

<sup>22</sup> Standard Abstract and Title Co, Lot 16 and the South 25 feet of Lot 17 Middleton Addition, Tulsa Title, and Abstract, Tulsa, OK.

<sup>23</sup> Abstract

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It is unclear if Nancy Wingfield was married when she purchased the property. In 1920, the city directory listed Mrs. Wingfield as a widow living with her son on Bryant Street in Tulsa. The entry lists her as a widow with no occupation and around forty-nine years of age. In 1923, two years removed from the Tulsa Race Massacre, Mrs. Wingfield and her son's family lived at 415 East King Street. Perhaps due to age and costs, Mrs. Wingfield never moved or built on her property at 1838 North Norfolk Avenue.<sup>24</sup>

In 1925, with the high demand for property in North Tulsa, Mrs. Wingfield sold the property to Frank R. Williams for one dollar. Williams also survived the massacre of 1921. A real estate agent, Williams operated apartments at 404 North Frankfort Avenue and operated cleaners at 122 North Elgin Avenue. It appears that Williams and his wife lived above the cleaners on North Elgin Avenue at the time of the Tulsa Race Massacre.<sup>25</sup> They lost both businesses in the devastating fires. It is unclear if Williams ever developed the property at 1838 North Norfolk Avenue. In the 1930s, he took out a \$5,000 loan sponsored by the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in an effort to stimulate residential construction during the Great Depression. It is possible that Williams used the loan in an attempt to build a house on the land or use it as collateral for constructing or purchasing other property. Williams owned the land until July 1941, when he sold it to J. H. Goodwin.<sup>26</sup>

It is not clear when J. H. Goodwin came to Tulsa from Mississippi. However, he quickly became involved in the growing economic prosperity of Greenwood and prospered himself. Goodwin became a stockholder in the variety store that he worked in. He partnered with another Tulsan to establish the Jackson Funeral Parlor, the oldest and only Black-owned funeral home for African Americans in Tulsa. Goodwin purchased and developed property in North Tulsa using money from his other investments. During the race massacre, Goodwin lost his funeral home, personal property, multiple rental properties, and part of his store. Claiming losses of over \$38,000, he sued the City of Tulsa and the police department for failure to protect their citizens and charged them with conspiracy to destroy the property and lives of the citizens of Tulsa.<sup>27</sup> It is believed Goodwin acquired the future 1838 North Norfolk Avenue as a potential rental investment.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Charles (Charley) and Bertha Blevins*

Charles (Charley) and Bertha Blevins were part of Greenwood's reconstruction and became a fixture in the community. After her husband's death in 1953, Bertha continued to encourage and

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<sup>24</sup> Abstract

<sup>25</sup> Tulsa City Directory, (Tulsa, OK.: Polk-Hoffhine Directory Company, 1920, 1923, 1924, 1925); United States Federal Census: Tulsa County, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1920. Ancestry.com. Accessed September 2, 2022; Photograph F. R. Williams' Apartments, August 8, 1914, Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 photographs, The University of Tulsa Archives, University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

<sup>26</sup> Abstract

<sup>27</sup> Jim Goodwin, Interview by John Erling, March 29, 2012. [www.voicesofoklahoma.com](http://www.voicesofoklahoma.com). Accessed April 1, 2023; "Black Wall Street Pioneers: James Henri Goodwin Among the Black Wall Street Pioneering Souls," Greenwood Cultural Center. [www.greenwoodculturalcenter.org](http://www.greenwoodculturalcenter.org). Accessed April 1, 2023; J.H. Goodwin, "Petition in the District Court of Tulsa County, State of Oklahoma," Tulsa Historical Society. [www.tulsaohistory.org](http://www.tulsaohistory.org). Accessed April 1, 2023.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Census Report Tulsa County, 1940. Ancestry.com.

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create a sense of community in North Tulsa by promoting civil rights and supporting voting. Using their home as a community gathering place, they encouraged the development and rebuilding of Black Tulsa.

It is unclear when Charley Blevins arrived in Tulsa. Born in Arkansas in 1897, he arrived in Tulsa by 1917. His aunt, Odessa, who lived at 412 North Greenwood Avenue, perhaps enticed the young man to move to Tulsa for its job opportunities. He soon found work as a porter at the luxurious Brady Hotel in downtown Tulsa at Archer and Main streets, established by Wyatt Tate Brady in 1903.<sup>29</sup> The Brady Hotel employed numerous African Americans, and Brady himself invested in numerous properties near the hotel.<sup>30</sup>

Blevins must have been thrifty with his earnings from the Brady Hotel and learned business savvy during his employment there. By 1930, he opened his own hotel at 310 North Greenwood Avenue (no longer extant). Charley and Bertha operated the hotel until he died in 1953 and they lived above the hotel until 1944.<sup>31</sup> The hotel added to the rebuilding of North Tulsa's economy. Blevins also found himself at the center of several secret raids that cracked down on bootlegging. Although the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment repealed Prohibition, the sale of whiskey remained illegal under state law. In 1944, Tulsa newspapers reported authorities charged Blevins with possessing eight gallons of untaxed whiskey.<sup>32</sup>

The Blevins purchased the nominated property from J. H. Goodwin for one dollar in March 1944.<sup>33</sup> The low price likely indicates that the lots remained undeveloped at this time. It could also reflect the inability of African Americans to obtain mortgage loans. The Blevins subsequently filed a building permit and constructed a one-story house (plus basement) in the popular Craftsman/Bungalow style. Locals report that the Blevins lived in a garage apartment on the property during the house's construction.<sup>34</sup> Upon completion, the bungalow allowed the couple to live apart from their business, become even more involved in the community, and assist with furthering equality in Tulsa.

### *Blevins and the Promotion of Civil Rights*

Charley and Bertha Blevins actively assisted in promoting civil rights in Tulsa. Having completed a house that featured a full basement with direct, outdoor access, the Blevins opened their home as a residential polling place in a 1945 local election. In 1952, they opened their

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<sup>29</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Tulsa County, Tulsa, Oklahoma. 1930, Ancestry.com; U.S. Selective Service, Charles Blevins Draft Card. 1919. Ancestry.com.

<sup>30</sup> Lee Roy Chapman, "The Nightmare of Dreamland: Tate Brady and the Tulsa Outrage," *This Land* (April 15, 2021),

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Tulsa County, Tulsa, Oklahoma. 1930, Ancestry.com; Polk-Hoffline, *Tulsa City Directory*. (1930),

<sup>32</sup> "Liquor Cases," *The Tulsa World*. February 21, 1944, pg. 8; "Draws \$100 Fine in Old Liquor Possession Case," *Tulsa Tribune*: February 15, 1945, page 5.

<sup>33</sup> Abstract, J. H. Goodwin to Charlie and Bertha Blevins, March 7, 1944.

<sup>34</sup> Abstract; "The Day in Tulsa," *The Oklahoma Eagle*. July 1, 1944, pg.1; Cheronda Ballard, Interview by Stacy Reaves, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 27, 2023.

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home for voting once again. Locals continued to cast their votes in the basement of the Blevins home until 1962 for various local, county, state, and national elections.<sup>35</sup>

The couple officially joined the cause in 1944 during an NAACP drive for membership.<sup>36</sup> Charley helped promote civil rights through his involvement and membership with the Prince Hall Masons. Bertha promoted civil rights and community-building through her membership in the Eastern Star.<sup>37</sup> After having the house serve as a polling place in 1945, the Blevins used their hotel as a polling place in 1947.<sup>38</sup> By operating a polling place, the Blevins provided a safe place for African Americans to cast their ballots. In 1952, local voters once again entered the basement of the Blevins house to cast their votes in a local election. Polling places in residences were not uncommon in Oklahoma. In the late 1950s, approximately fifty-nine residences were polling places in west, east, and north Tulsa.<sup>39</sup> County election offices recruited homes to operate at polling places to encourage voting and provide convenient polling places.<sup>40</sup> Local civil rights leaders and organizations likely worked with the county election board to create residential polling places in North Tulsa, offering African Americans in North Tulsa a safe place to vote. Between 1952 and 1962, locals participated in local, county, state, and national elections in the basement of the Blevins' home. The home offered voters a place to cast their ballots for the president in 1960.<sup>41</sup>

The Blevins home became a gathering place for residents of North Tulsa and the Middleton Addition. The lively couple offered dances and community events in their finished basement.<sup>42</sup> Bertha Blevins, like many middle-class women and wives of businesspeople, hosted social gatherings of various groups in her home. She belonged to the Phyllis Wheatly Eastern Star.<sup>43</sup> In addition to their business, this membership helped Bertha make connections in the community and help promote social activities. As a Mt. Olive Baptist Church Women's Missionary group member, Bertha promoted civil rights by hosting a Human Relations tea in her home.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, Mrs. Blevin's promoted voting through her involvement in the North Tulsa Democrat Women's club which she served as the chair of publicity.<sup>45</sup> In addition to promoting

<sup>35</sup> "Tulsa County Polling Places," *The Tulsa Daily World*, November 1945, page 21; "The Complete List of Tulsa County Voting Places," *The Tulsa World*, November 3, 1952, page 2. "Tulsa County Polling," *Tulsa Daily World*, July 1, 1958, page 1; "Only Two Polling Places Changed," *Tulsa Tribune*, July 24, 1960, page 20.

<sup>36</sup> "NACCP Drive Continues," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, June 10, 1944, pg. 3

<sup>37</sup> Princeetta Newman Interview; "Wilson Shrine No. 2 and Eastern Stars Attend St. John Day in Oklahoma City," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, June 30, 1949.

<sup>38</sup> "Polling places for General Election," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, May 1947.

<sup>39</sup> "Polling Places in Tulsa," *The Tulsa World* March 1956.

<sup>40</sup> "Oklahoma's Three Presidential Polling Places are Vital for Rural Voters," *The Frontier*, November 11, 2022. [www.readfrontier.org/stories/Oklahomasthreepollingplacesvitaltoruralvoters.com](http://www.readfrontier.org/stories/Oklahomasthreepollingplacesvitaltoruralvoters.com)

<sup>41</sup> "The Complete List of Polling Places," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, November 3, 1952: "Some Sites Changed," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, July 17, 1962; Princeetta Newman Interview; "Election Proclamation," *Tulsa Daily Legal News*, November 17, 1960, page 8.

<sup>42</sup> Cheronda Ballard, Interview by Stacy Reaves, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 27, 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Princeetta Newman.

<sup>44</sup> "Highlights Social Scene," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, February 25, 1954.

<sup>45</sup> "Clubs and "Greeks" *Oklahoma Eagle*, November 18, 1956, pg. 3



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civil rights, Mrs. Blevins also worked to improve the North Tulsa community through her involvement with social and arts organizations. In addition to hosting events for her daughter's Girl Scout troop, Bertha held teas and meetings in her home for the Mary Bethune Art Club.<sup>46</sup> The couple showed off their beautiful home by participating in Christmas lighting and hosting elaborate dinner parties for notable members of the community such as Dr. and Mrs. John Hope Franklin.<sup>47</sup>

On November 9, 1953, Charley Blevins died. After Charley's death, Bertha closed the hotel. The beautiful red brick house at 1838 North Norfolk Avenue became the property of his widow, Bertha.<sup>48</sup> Mrs. Blevins continued to offer the basement as a polling place until 1962. It is unknown why the Blevins House ceased to be a polling place after 1962. Regardless, Mrs. Blevins began using her home to house displaced African-American children needing a home and loving guidance.<sup>49</sup> Another factor might be that Mrs. Blevins rented out rooms to help supplement her income during the 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>50</sup> Bertha helped promote the economic and social development of North Tulsa in the mid-twentieth century, in addition to fostering voting and civil rights before the passage of the 1964 federal Civil Rights Act. As a widow raising children alone and on a limited income, Bertha continued to reside in and maintain the home until her death on March 3, 1989. She was 92 years old.<sup>51</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Blevins House reflects the resiliency of North Tulsa's African American community. Originally part of a Cherokee allotment, the property offered the potential for a new start for several survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Racial discrimination in Tulsa initially prevented previous owners from being able to develop the property. Charley Blevins used money from his hotel to build a home on the property by 1945, thus adding to the redevelopment of Greenwood and the surrounding area.

Charley and Bertha Blevins used the property to help further civil rights by hosting a polling place and community events in the basement of their simple Craftsman/Bungalow. Local civil rights leaders and organizations held voter registration drives throughout North Tulsa during the mid-twentieth century, believing that voting was the key to obtaining greater civil rights. The Blevins House as a polling place in North Tulsa offered a safe and convenient place for Black Tulsans to vote. They did not have to worry about intimidation at the polls by voting in their neighborhood. The couple's engagement in the community's social, political, and economic life continued to the growth and rebuilding of a community still struggling with the trauma of violence associated with the 1921 race massacre. The Blevins contributed to the push for voting

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<sup>46</sup> "Silver Tea Held," *The Oklahoma Eagle*. March 9, 1950.

<sup>47</sup> "Blevins Gives Elaborate Party," *The Oklahoma Eagle*. April 30, 1953, pg.4.

<sup>48</sup> Abstract: Cheronda Ballard, Interview by Stacy Reaves, Tulsa, Oklahoma, March 27, 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Cheronda Ballard.

<sup>50</sup> "Ad for Modern Apartment," *The Oklahoma Eagle*. August 22, 1957, pg 4.

<sup>51</sup> Oklahoma State Vital Records Index, <https://ok2explore.health.ok.gov/>, accessed October 13, 2023; "Deaths," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, March 9, 1989; Tulsa City Directory, 1988.

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and civil rights among African Americans by their involvement in local groups such as the Masons, Eastern Star, Mt. Olive Baptist Church, and NAACP. Bertha's continued commitment to and promotion of social organizations after her husband's death further advanced social life, the arts, and civic engagement in North Tulsa.

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**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: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** .37 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 36.181969 Longitude: -95.977939

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

East 160' of Lot 16 and East 160' of the South 25' of Lot 17, Block 1, Middleton Addition.  
Section 25, Township 20 North, Range 12 East of the Indian Meridian.

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**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This is the legal description of the property that is found at the county tax assessor and on the legal abstract.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Stacy W. Reaves, Historian on behalf of Preservation Oklahoma (edits by M. Pearce, OK/SHPO)  
organization: Preservation Oklahoma  
street & number: 405 NW 15th St  
city or town: Oklahoma City state: Ok zip code: 73103  
e-mail: reavessw@gmail.com  
telephone: 405-525-5325  
date: 3 June 2023; rev. October 2023

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Charles and Bertha Blevins House

City or Vicinity: Tulsa

County: Tulsa

State: Oklahoma

Photographer: Stacy Reaves

Date Photographed: February 20, 2023 and March 3, 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 10.

- 0001 East Façade, camera facing west
- 0002 North Elevation, camera facing east
- 0003 South Elevation, camera facing northeast
- 0004 West (Rear) Elevation, camera facing east
- 0005 Door on east end of south elevation, camera facing north
- 0006 Outside stairs leading to basement, camera facing east
- 0007 Entrance to basement, camera facing south
- 0008 Interior of basement, window and exterior door, camera facing north
- 0009 Living room fireplace, camera facing north
- 0010 Basement, camera facing north

**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 100 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.



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National Park Service

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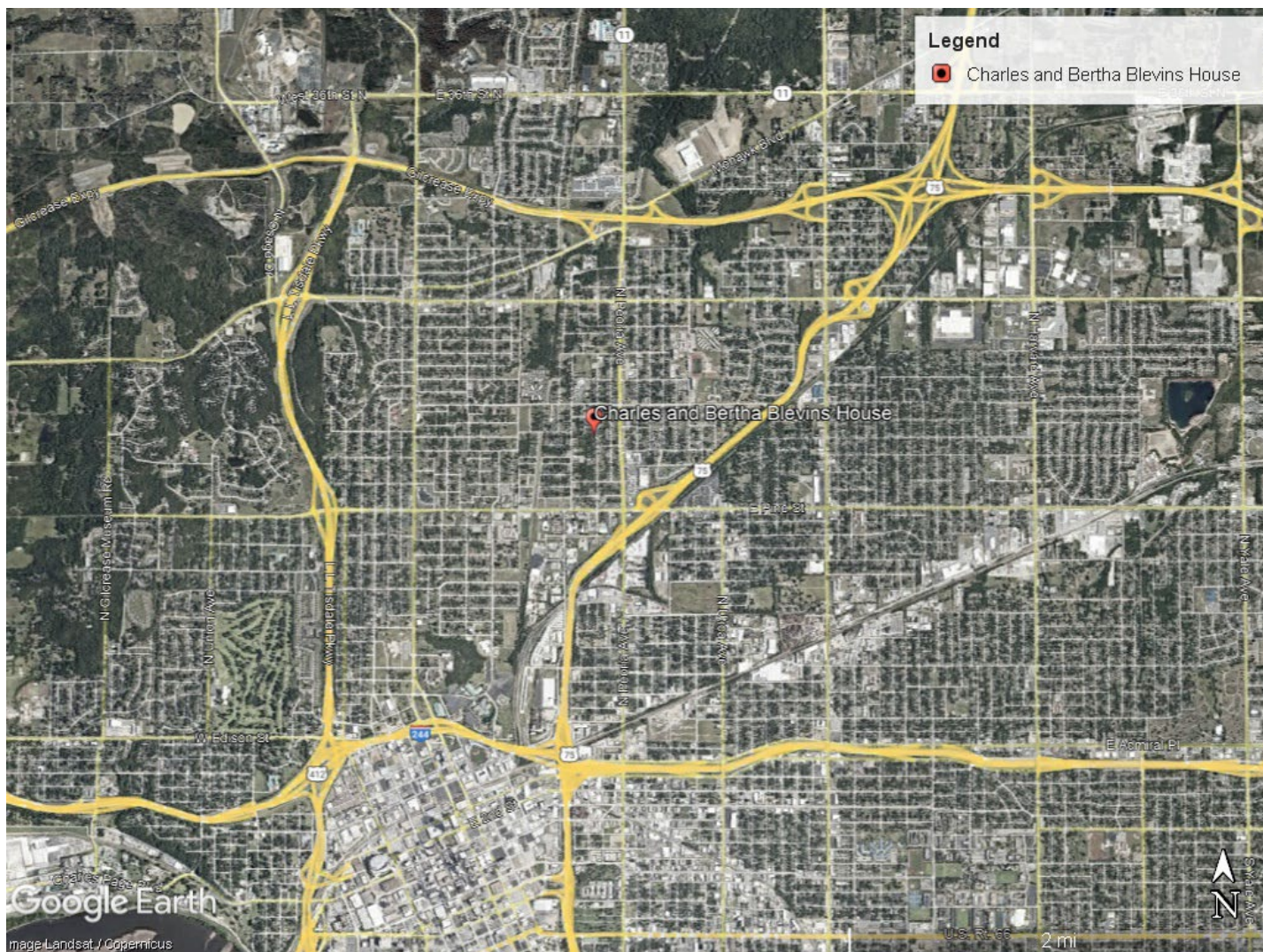
County and State

N/A

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Section number Maps Page 1

Map 1: General Location, Charles and Bertha Blevins House





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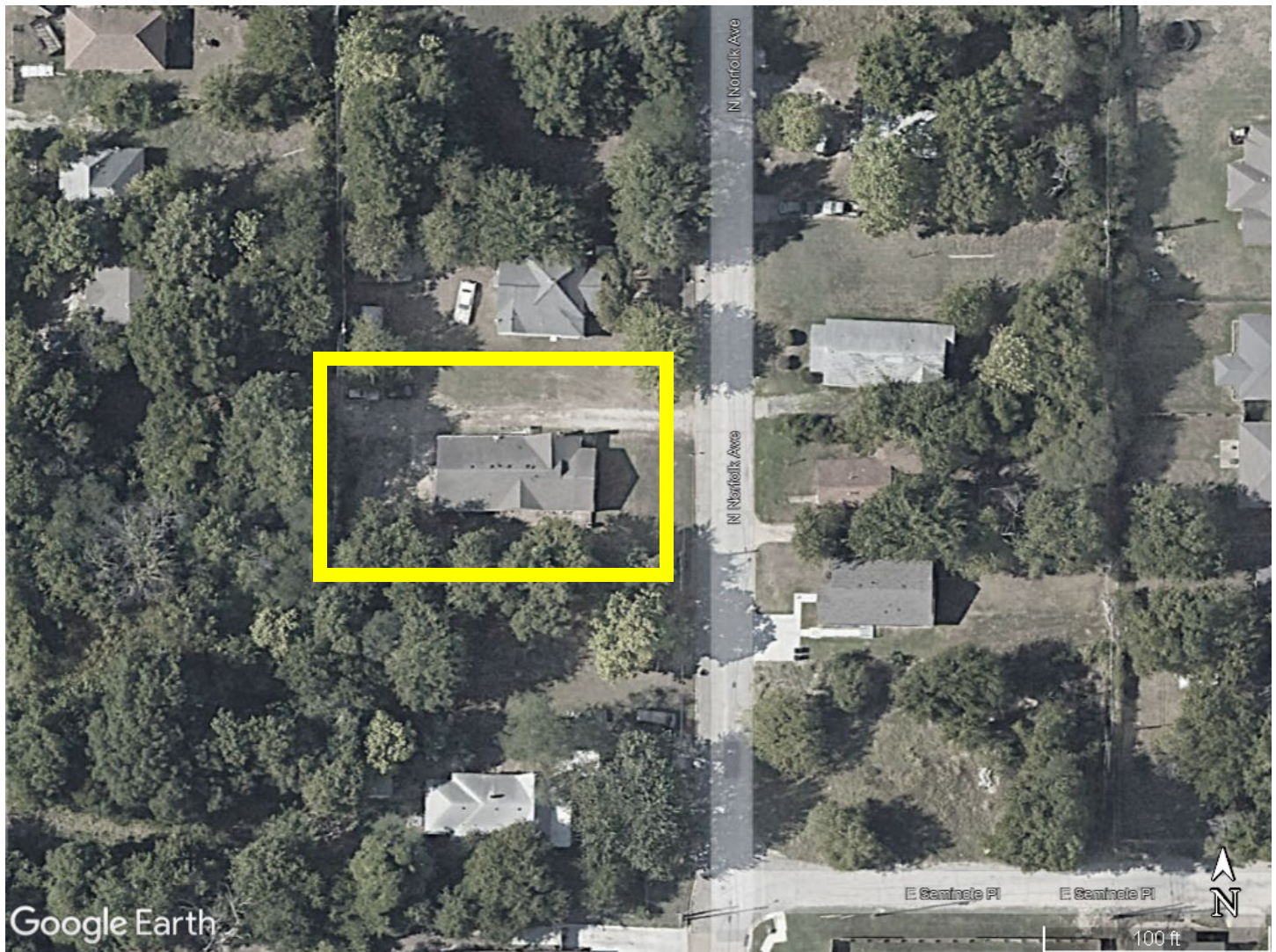
County and State

N/A

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**Map 2: Charles and Bertha Blevins House, Approximate Property Boundaries (in yellow)**





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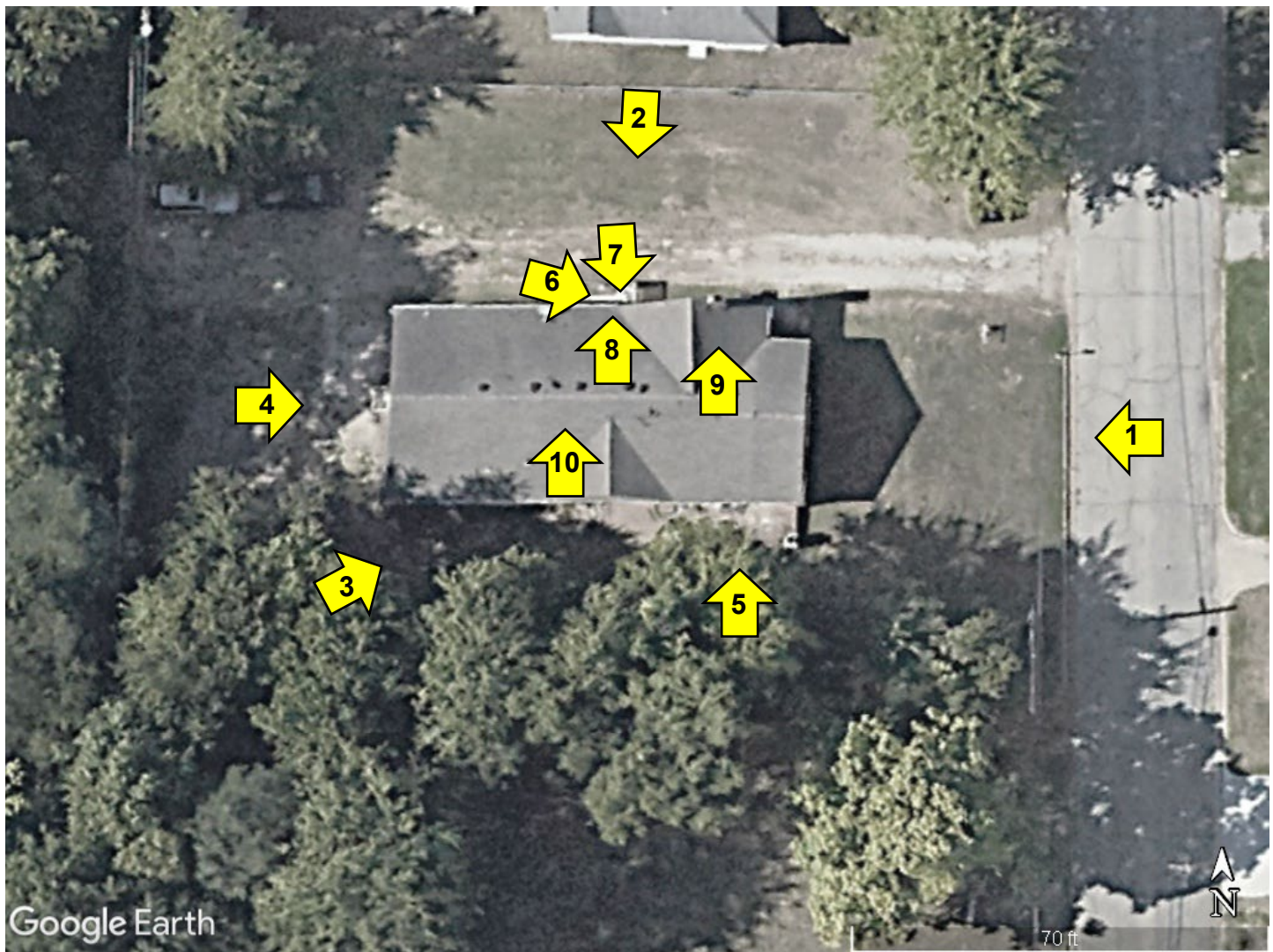
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**Map 3: Photo Key**



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Figure 1: Charles and Bertha Blevins House, c. 2001.



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Photograph 0001 East Façade, camera facing west



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Photograph 0002 North Elevation, camera facing east



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Photograph 0003 South Elevation, camera facing northeast



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Photograph 0004 West (Rear) Elevation, camera facing east

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Photograph 0005 Door on east end of south elevation, camera facing north



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Photograph 0006 Outside stairs leading to basement, camera facing east



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Photograph 0007 Entrance to basement, camera facing south

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**National Park Service**

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Photograph 0008 Interior of basement, window and exterior door, camera facing north



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**National Park Service**

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Photograph 0009 Living room fireplace, camera facing north



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Photograph 0010 Basement, camera facing north