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THE GILDED AGE ESTATES
OF LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP, PENNSYLVANIA:
A HISTORY AND PRESERVATION PLAN

Stephanie Hetos Cocke

A THESIS

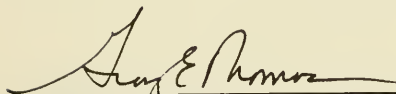
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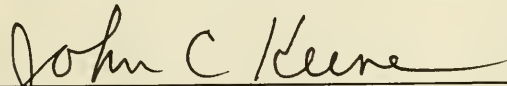
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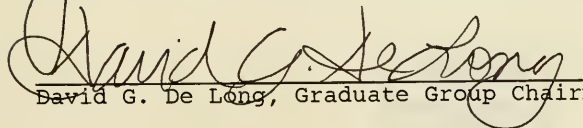
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INTRODUCTION

As he strolled along Newport's Cliff Walk in 1905, the author Henry James was shocked at the opulence of the mansions that had been built since his last visit to America several years before. He described the country houses he saw as "white elephants," pitying "their averted owners [who], roused from a witless dream, [would] wonder what in the world is to be done with them."¹ James' remarks were prophetic, for a major problem facing preservation professionals today is the ultimate fate of the large estates built throughout the country during the exuberant, confident, period in American civilization between 1865 and 1905. It was a time first referred to by Mark Twain as "the Gilded Age."²

According to a paper released in 1982 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation,

The large estates built throughout America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are an important part of the cultural legacy of their communities...[They] reflect an era of prosperity as well as the skill of local craftsmen and builders. In addition, many properties cover large areas of land, which have an environmental and economic importance to communities.³

As William C. Shopsis has pointed out in Saving Large Estates, the properties amassed during America's Gilded Age should no longer be viewed as merely anachronistic class symbols of an aristocratic lifestyle unworthy of acknowledg-

ment or preservation.⁴ Instead, these estates are often extensive tracts of unspoiled open space having important land use implications, while at the same time serving as examples of the work of important local architects and landscape designers.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the plight of the estates in one township, Lower Merion, which will in 1988 celebrate the 275th anniversary of its founding. This community, a part of a string of suburbs just west of Philadelphia commonly referred to as the "Main Line," was the subject of Philip Berry's play The Philadelphia Story. My intent is to consider the rise of the great estates in Lower Merion Township, to analyze the increasing suburbanization in this century that greatly reduced their numbers, to identify those estates that still remain, and finally, to analyze existing planning and preservation controls in the township and propose solutions that should be implemented to ensure their future preservation.

Preservation of these properties involves many complexities, including zoning, subdivision controls, preservation-enabling legislation, taxation, and community response. These elements interact in crucial ways and, if not coordinated, can cause considerable uncertainty in efforts to preserve the character of estates. To help reduce some of these uncertainties, careful long range

consideration of land use policies and comprehensive planning policies is essential. First, however, the period known as the Gilded Age must be examined so that the estates' great cultural significance may be understood in its proper context.

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1. Henry James, The American Scene (New York, 1967), 224-25, 161-62.

2. Twain used this term as the title of a satirical novel written with Charles Dudley Warner in 1873.

3. Christopher W. Closs, "Preserving Large Estates," Information Series, National Trust for Historic Preservation (Washington, D.C., 1982), 1.

4. William C. Shopsis and Grania Bolton Marcus, Saving Large Estates: Conservation, Historic Preservation, Adaptive Reuse (Setauket, NY, 1977), 3.

CHAPTER I

THE GILDED AGE IN AMERICA

In 1853, landscape architect A. J. Downing--whose writings and designs dominated mid-century attitudes toward American domestic architecture--cautioned in his Architecture of Country Houses that great estates were appropriate to a monarchy rather than to a republic like the United States. Scarcely a generation later, however, it was clear that his warnings would not be heeded.¹ The four decades following the Civil War were years of astounding economic growth. Vast empires in oil, shipping, mining, banking, lumber, transportation, and related industries formed between approximately 1865 and 1905.² C. Wright Mills explains in The Power Elite:

Before the Civil War, only a handful of wealthy men, notably Astor and Vanderbilt, were multimillionaires on a truly American scale.... The word "millionaire," in fact, was coined only in 1843, when, upon the death of Peter Lorillard [snuff, banking, real estate], the newspapers needed a term to denote great affluence.³

The Civil War dramatically altered the composition and characteristics of the upper class. Throughout the North, the war brought about a period of substantial money-making and lavish spending. As in all wars, military supplies were in great demand and the small industrial enterprises of the North were in an excellent position to expand and

supply them; many small industrialists grew exceedingly wealthy before the war's end.⁴ Stimulated by war production, after the war, the American industrial revolution launched even greater fortunes in railroads, banking, oil, mining, and other fields. In this era, fortunes were made and lost quickly, almost easily. In 1865, there were only three millionaires--William Vanderbilt, William Astor, and merchant A. T. Stewart--but by 1900, there were suddenly more than four thousand millionaires, twenty of whom were worth more than seventy-five million dollars each.⁵

The new value system encouraged--nearly demanded--the public display of this newly acquired wealth, power and prestige. The established upper class of the period realized that their ranks were being infiltrated by the new rich. One upper-class member wrote that "all at once Society [was] being assailed from every side by persons who seek to climb boldly over the walls of social exclusiveness."⁶

It was during these turbulent years that a new variation on an old type of domestic architecture first appeared on the American landscape. Called the "country estate," these houses and surrounding grounds were grandiose in scale. Most estates were originally established as part of a fashion for life as a "country gentleman," derived from British models and fostered by considerable contact with

the British and European aristocracies.⁷ As Barr Feree explained in 1904:

Country houses we have always had, and large ones too; but the great country house as it is now understood is a new type of dwelling, a sumptuous house built at large expense, often palatial in its dimensions, furnished in the richest manner, and placed on an estate, perhaps large enough to admit of independent farming operations, and in most cases with a garden which is an integral part of the architectural scheme.⁸

Here Feree provides us with a useful definition of the Gilded Age country estate: the scale of its main house was huge, its furnishings, sumptuous, and the surrounding land holdings were substantial, usually formally landscaped, and dotted with various outbuildings to serve the needs of estate living.

Historian Kenneth Jackson has written that the men who built these homes were acutely aware of the tenuous nature of their achievements and of the rapid intellectual, ethnic, social, and political changes that were undermining previous beliefs and values. Therefore, in order to justify the risks, the long hours at the office, the sacrifices for family and posterity, and in order to gain a larger measure of social acceptance, "the robber baron sought security in a country estate, an impressive physical edifice that would represent more stability than any urban residence."⁹

In Philadelphia, especially, often the houses were anachronistic in mode, resembling medieval castles. In his new text which accompanies George William Sheldon's Artistic Country-Seats of 1886, Arnold Lewis writes:

New wealth did not mind old containers, a truism demonstrated on European soil centuries before the idea crossed the Atlantic. On the other hand, they were not old containers, for repeating the past would have been impractical, a criticism a successful businessman would not have appreciated. [These houses] were unusually creative marriages of forms inspired by the past with materials and purposes conditioned by the present.¹⁰

The country houses generally bore imposing facades complemented by manicured gardens, with exceptionally large reception rooms, halls, parlors, dining rooms, and other public areas.

The mansion itself was usually placed in the center of the property. The extended setback served two purposes. First, it allowed for an impressively long driveway to be built from the estate entrance to the main dwelling. Second, the setback minimized the possibility of unwanted contact with outsiders. The other structures on the estate were centrally located around the main entrance to the property; having all facilities in one section of an estate was considered the most convenient arrangement. Among the various buildings that were commonly included on the estates were servants' cottages, guest houses, greenhouses, and garages.¹¹

These country seats were the product of the optimism and self-confidence of both clients and architects, of available land usually obtainable at reasonable rates, of the possibility and desire for leisure time, of the growing reaction to the city as a place for raising families and, above all, of an expanding economy that made quick fortunes easy and their public demonstrations irresistible.¹²

What was the intended message of this kind of domestic architecture? Possibly its scale expressed the abundant resources within, its skyline conveyed pride and vigor, and its historical references demonstrated knowledge, good taste, and a desired association with the proven past rather than the unpredictable present--even though the present made the house possible in the first place.¹³

In the Theory of the Leisure Class, the often satirical social critique of 1899, Thorstein Veblen cites such residences as examples of "conspicuous consumption," a phrase he invented. As he explains of the phenomenon, "In order to gain and to hold the esteem of men it is not sufficient merely to possess wealth or power. The wealth or power must be put in evidence, for esteem is awarded only on evidence."¹⁴

Dwellings on this scale prompted the Senate Committee on Education and Labor, in 1885, to consider legislation putting a cap on the amount a millionaire could spend on

his house.¹⁵ In the 1890s, a period of severe economic hardship and social turmoil, a torrent of condemnation found its way into the periodicals. E. L. Godkin's 1896 article "The Expenditure of Rich Men" held that affluent Americans faced a problem unknown to their European counterparts: how to spend their money. Here the wealthy had to decide for themselves what abroad was dictated largely by tradition and descent.¹⁶ Godkin writes,

That, under these circumstances, they should, in somewhat slavish imitation of Europe, choose the most conspicuous European mode of asserting social supremacy, the building of great houses, is not surprising. They want the principle reasons for European houses. One is that great houses are in Europe either signs of great territorial possessions or the practice of hospitality on a scale unknown among us.¹⁷

The other reason, said Godkin, and the most serious argument against the building of great houses in America, was that dwellings "should be in some sort of accord with national manners and palatial residences were not."¹⁸

Until recently, a critical view toward the great houses of this period persisted. As David Chase writes of Richard Morris Hunt, a favorite society architect of Gilded Age New York and Newport, "[His later houses] are so grand, so palatial, that they are judged to be alien to American culture, and for this they are condemned. Few critics since Montgomery Schuyler's day have been able to overcome this bias and evaluate these dwellings dispass-

sionately."19

In this decade, fortunately, a new appreciation of the Gilded Age has begun to emerge. Instead of a source of embarrassment, today this era is increasingly viewed as a period of profound cultural significance to the history of American civilization. It was a time of selfish pleasure, to be sure, but also a time in which prosperity and values enabled a few to build magnificent structures as symbols of their achievement. Though often not architecturally innovative, these mansions were usually laden with rich personal detail and of the finest craftsmanship and technology available at the time. One hundred years later, and precisely 275 years after the founding of Lower Merion Township, it is appropriate to study with renewed interest the rise and fall of the grand houses of this region so that our local achievement can be understood, and in appropriate instances, be preserved.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. Andrew Jackson Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses (New York, 1853).
2. Arnold Lewis, American Country Houses of the Gilded Age (Mineola, NY, 1982).
3. C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite (New York, 1956), 101.
4. Dennis P. Sobin, Dynamics of Community Change: the Case of Long Island's Declining "Gold Coast" (New York, 1968), 10.
5. Mary Cable, Top Drawer: American High Society from the Gilded Age to the Roaring Twenties (New York, 1984).
6. Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer, The Social Ladder (New York, 1924), p. 5, quoted in David Chase, "Superb Privacies" in Architecture of Richard Morris Hunt. Susan R. Stein, ed. (Chicago, 1986).
7. William C. Shopsin and Grania Bolton Marcus, Saving Large Estates: Conservation, Historic Preservation, Adaptive Reuse (Setauket, NY), 6.
8. Barr Feree, American Estates and Gardens (New York, 1904).
9. Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York, 1985).
10. Arnold Lewis, American Country Houses of the Gilded Age (Mineola, NY, 1982), 20. Reprint of pictorial material from Artistic Country-Seats: Types of Recent American Villa and Cottage Architecture with Instances of Country Club-Houses, by George William Sheldon (New York, 1886-87).
11. Sobin 45.
12. Lewis, x.
13. Ibid, 20.

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14. Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899), reprint ed. (New York, 1967).

15. David Chase, "Superb Privacies" in Architecture of Richard Morris Hunt. Susan R. Stein, ed. (Chicago, 1986), 167.

16. E. L. Godkin, "The Expenditure of Rich Men," Scribners Magazine 20, no.4 (October 1896), 497-500, as quoted in Chase.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THE COUNTRY ESTATES OF LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP

The Pennsylvania township of Lower Merion, originally part of William Penn's "Liberty Lands" in his 1682 plan for Philadelphia, is bounded by the Schuylkill River, the borough of West Conshohocken, Upper Merion, Radnor, and Haverford Townships, and the city of Philadelphia. (Illustration 1). The present size is 23.34 square miles, having been slightly reduced twice, when West Conshohocken and then Narberth became separate boroughs in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.¹

The history of Lower Merion, like that of many of the surrounding townships, began in England in the late seventeenth century. It was there that a number of Welshmen, with hopes of founding a settlement for their countrymen in the new world, purchased land, sight unseen, from William Penn. Among the early settlers in Lower Merion, Rowland Ellis, Edward Jones, Robert Owen, Hugh Roberts, and John Thomas were all from Merioneth, a county in Wales later remembered in the choice of the new settlement's name.²

The popular term "Main Line" arose in the 1860s when the Pennsylvania Railroad decided to straighten the meandering track along the primary route to Pittsburgh. Rather than fight the farmers along the way, the Railroad bought them out. After shifting the right-of-way, it then went

into the real estate business, selling large tracts to individual purchasers and large developers.³ The earliest residential development in Lower Merion Township was along or near Lancaster, Montgomery, and City Line Avenues, today locations of high-density populations.⁴ Near the present Bryn Mawr station on Montgomery Avenue, for example, the Railroad bought a large tract of land, marked off streets, planted trees, and set up private zoning regulations which included minimum set-back and house value limits.⁵

The construction of the Railroad's "Main Line" encouraged many wealthy city residents, some of them railroad officials, to build large houses in this area, and it was during the 1870s that Lower Merion's first large houses were amassed. (Illustration 2). In 1872, for example, Dr. Edmund Cadwallader Evans--the father of architect Allen Evans, Frank Furness' partner--bought a hundred acres in Haverford and built a house off Montgomery Avenue at the end of what is now called Evans Lane. The house is no longer standing. The following year, Pennsylvania Railroad president Alexander J. Cassatt bought from him fifty-six of these acres, which stretched from the railroad down Gray's Lane and over to the present Cheswold Lane.⁶ There he engaged Furness and Evans to design a huge mansion, which he called "Cheswold," for him and his growing family. (Illustration 3). Today, only the gatehouse still stands,

the land having been absorbed into the property of the Merion Cricket Club.⁷

Another prominent Philadelphian who settled in Haverford was Clement A. Griscom, a shipbuilder who became president of the International Navigation Company. Griscom bought sixty-two acres across Gray's Lane from Evans and Cassatt and named his estate "Dolobran," the name of a family seat in Wales.⁸ "Dolobran" began as an old farm house which Furness and Evans altered and extended in 1881 and again in 1894. (Illustration 4). It featured the widely-varied wall surfaces and floral ornament for which Furness is known.⁹ The estate, which is still located on a small tract on Laurel Lane, comprised nearly 150 acres in 1908.

These three houses, though large and surrounded by great tracts of land, were only precursors to the more opulent Gilded Age estates which came in the 1880s and 1890s. As with the Gold Coast of Long Island and such towns as Brookline, Massachusetts, wealthy Lower Merion Township founders gradually chose to build increasingly formal, sumptuous country estates that gave the area a new flavor. Philadelphia's most talented and prominent architects rose to the occasion. Between 1880 and 1915, dozens of estates were amassed, dotting the Lower Merion landscape with a degree of scale and expenditure that has never

existed before or since. Table 1 shows the residential commissions of five prominent Philadelphia architects whom Main Line Philadelphia gentlemen often sought to design their country houses.

TABLE 1--Lower Merion Township Residential Projects of
Five Philadelphia Architects Between 1880 and 1915

THEOPHILUS PARSONS CHANDLER, JR. (1845-1928)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>CLIENT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
1881	Rudolph Ellis	Bryn Mawr
1882	George S. Gerhard Wayne McVeagh	Ardmore Bryn Mawr
1884	Samuel B. Brown	Haverford
1885	William Simpson, Jr. Joseph B. Townsend	Wynnewood Merion
1890	Eugene Delano	
1891	William Joyce	Rosemont
1902	Silas Pettit	Bryn Mawr
1906	A. F. Kelly	Bryn Mawr

WILSON EYRE (1858-1944)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>CLIENT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
1888	J. Rulon Miller	Haverford
1889	Sidney A. Biddle	Ardmore
1891	Rev. Dr. Robins	Merion
1905	J. B. Ladd F. G. Thompson	Ardmore Merion
1910	William S. Ellis	Bryn Mawr
1911	Horatio G. Lloyd J. Stanley Reeves	Haverford Haverford
1914	P. W. Roberts	Villanova

TABLE 1--continued

FRANK FURNESS (1839-1912)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>CLIENT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
1878	Allan Evans	Haverford
1881	Rowland Evans	Haverford
	Clement Griscom	Haverford
	William P. Henszley	Wynnewood
1886	I. Layton Register	Ardmore
1887	Henry C. Register	
	William Winsor	Ardmore
1889	Frank Thompson	Bala Cynwyd
1890	George Gerhard	Ardmore
1897	R. C. Griscom	Haverford
1906	J. Ogden Hoffman	Villanova
	Marriott Smith	Wynnewood

GEORGE HEWITT (1841-1916)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>CLIENT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
1877	William H. Maule	Villanova
1881	Henry Gibson	Wynnewood
1886	W. T. Harris	Bala Cynwyd
	Andrew Wheeler	Bryn Mawr
no date	William Harris	Bala Cynwyd
	D. F. La Lanne	Bryn Mawr
	John Marston	Merion
	George H. McFadden	Villanova
	J. Rulon Miller	Haverford
	George Philler	Haverford
	Richard Rushton	Wynnewood

TABLE 1--continued

ADDISON HUTTON (1834-1916)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>CLIENT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
1880-81	George S. Lovell E. T. Townsend	Bryn Mawr Bryn Mawr
1882	George Vaux	Bryn Mawr
1883	John Garrett	Rosemont
1884	Charles Hartshorne	Merion
1885	Isaac H. Clothier	Wynnewood
1886	Effingham Morris	Ardmore
1887	Samuel L. Fox	Bryn Mawr
1890	Theodore Morris	Villanova
1891	Henry S. Drinker	Haverford

HORACE TRUMBAUER (1868-1938)

1892	A. J. Young	Ardmore
1903	J. C. Altemus	Ardmore
1905	W. P. Herbert W. H. Steigerwalt	Bala Cynwyd Merion
1909	Thomas P. Hunter	Haverford
1910	Theo Cramp	Bryn Mawr
1911	H. S. Darlington	Villanova
1913	Geraldine E. Mitchell	Haverford
1917-18	Morris Clothier	Villanova
1922	William J. Cooper ° Thomas J. Sinclair J. Clayton Strawbridge	Haverford Bala Cynwyd Merion
1922-23	Pam H. Dole	Wynnewood

It is important to emphasize that despite the new, conspicuously-consumptive values of this period, the level of opulence reflected in the local estates was strongly influenced by Quaker roots firmly established by the founding fathers of the township. Generally, therefore, the houses designed by these and other architects were of a lesser scale and extravagance than the estates built by such architects as Richard Morris Hunt and George W. Post in Newport and New York. The local estates are often tamed by both the Quaker-influenced tendency toward the less pretentious, and the more modest fortunes of, the Main Line Philadelphia gentry.

Nevertheless, these local estates are highly significant cultural resources, serving as important local examples of a new type of architecture, the country estate, and of the work of Philadelphia's most prominent architects of this era. Furthermore, the most important local mansions have certain common characteristics that create a distinctive regional expression of Gilded Age architectural tastes. For example, many of the estates in the Township were built of gray stone, as the schist from the nearby Wissahickon area was a readily available building material. (Illustration 5). In addition, many of the residences are castle-like and nearly brutalistic in appearance, with

thick stone walls and a profusion of towers. (Illustrations 6, 7, 8). There are notable exceptions to these characteristics, such as hacienda-like "La Ronda" and Georgian-inspired "Waverly Heights," two Gladwyne mansions, (illustrations 9, 10) but the medieval-castle mode was by far the most popular choice.

Three of the most significant surviving estates most greatly typify those built during this period. One of those that employs crenelated towers and bartizans is "Maybrook." (Illustration 11). A part of the seventeenth-century tract of Edward Jones, "Maybrook" still comprises twenty-six acres near the present Wynnewood train station on Penn Road. (Illustration 12).

It was built in 1881 by Henry C. Gibson, a prominent whiskey distiller and real estate developer, whose home at the time was a five-story mansion at 1612 Walnut Street. As his daughter Mary explained in an interview in 1956, "My father wanted to have a summer house in the country and my mother agreed to it, providing it was a very simple little cottage. One of my father's intimate friends was Mr. George W. Hewitt...and he and my father started making plans for the country house. My father had always admired the castles in Normandy and to my mother's dismay, she discovered that the little cottage was turning into a castle."¹⁰

The "castle" was actually designed by George W. Hewitt with his brother, W. D. Hewitt. George Hewitt studied in the office of John Notman, and later worked in partnership with Frank Furness. By 1884, George Hewitt would complete other residences for Gibson in the 3200 block of Powelton Avenue and on St. Marks Square in West Philadelphia. In 1886, Gibson again called upon Hewitt to design three stores at the corner of Thirteenth and Market Streets in central Philadelphia.¹¹

George Hewitt's other country house commissions included the William Henry Maule residence, "Briar Crest," an early Shingle-Style residence built in 1877 at the corner of Spring Mill and Old Gulph Roads in Villanova, (illustration 13) and the H. H. Houston house, "Drum Moir," designed in 1886 in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania.

Architectural historian Arnold Lewis describes "Maybrook" as "expensive, large, high [its tower rising seventy-two feet], asymmetrical and picturesque in skyline, and artistically inspired by earlier periods that were often highly romanticized...."¹² In this house, like so many others of the period, the architects chose to emulate such British architects as William Burges, who in turn derived their inspiration from the original medieval castles. Thus, the purposefully eclectic, unauthentic interpretation created by local architects for such Lower Merion mansions

as "Maybrook" can be attributed to the fact that the final products were a full two steps removed from their original source.

"Maybrook" is constructed of buff sandstone and covered with red Vermont slate. It is a long house, as even its stable is covered by the main roof. At one time the grounds at "Maybrook" were magnificently landscaped; two trees of every variety that would grow in the Philadelphia climate were planted.¹³ Six gardeners in the winter and as many as twenty-five in the summer maintained the grounds. Inside the main house, the quality of the finish is exceptional. All of the floors are oak except that of the hall, which is laid in German tile. The woodwork of the hall is oak, of the parlor, walnut, the library, butternut, and the dining room, mahogany. Lejambre, a fashionable Philadelphia craftsman, hand-carved the furniture throughout. To add to these richly-finished rooms, "Maybrook" was decorated with many works from Henry Gibson's noted art collection.

Its major rooms are not exceptionally large when compared with some of the other country estates which will be discussed later. Yet, overall, the scale is grand, as the architects later designed a number of additions to the house, including a library in 1889 that reportedly cost \$125,000.¹⁴ The house also contains a music room, added in

1906 by then-owner Mary Gibson. When the house first opened, the basement contained two hot-air furnaces and the attic two lead water tanks, filled by steam pumps to control the sanitary system of the house.

A second of the finest estates which still stands, off Montgomery Avenue in Rosemont, is "Rathalla," a thirty-two room medieval chateau designed in 1889 for Joseph Frances Sinnott, another Philadelphia distiller. (Illustration 14). In that year he took full control of the Moore & Sinnott Distillers, leaving behind his once-fashionable West Philadelphia address for a more prestigious Main Line location.¹⁵

Designed by the Philadelphia firm of Hazelhurst and Huckel, "Rathalla" is an excellent example of the estates of the period in its evocation of the chateaux of the Loire Valley of France. Edmund Hazelhurst and Samuel Huckel, Jr. had established their Philadelphia firm in 1881, soon after focusing their practice on residential design. On a smaller scale, it is reminiscent of the houses Richard Morris Hunt was building for his wealthy New York and Newport clients, the Vanderbilts and the Astors, in the same decade. Like "Biltmore," the George Washington Vanderbilt mansion in North Carolina and "Ochre Court" in Newport, "Rathalla" draws from features of several Loire Valley chateaux in an eclectic, non-specific manner.

"Rathalla" possesses similar detailing to that seen in local architect T. P. Chandler's designs. Like several of Chandler's works, "Rathalla" features a battlemented entrance porch flanked by paired towers with conical roofs. The interior contains a three-story light well directly above the central hall fireplace that provides both light for the lower stories and a sense of extravagant spaciousness above.¹⁶

A third estate still in existence in Gladwyne, where the steel-making Wood family once owned over four hundred acres, is Alan Wood, Jr.'s "Woodmont," which comprised ninety-five acres. (Illustration 15). Frank and William L. Price, two architect brothers, designed the French Gothic mansion house, which was built in 1891 on high land overlooking the Schuylkill River and Conshohocken.¹⁷ William Price had entered the office of Quaker architect Addison Hutton in 1878, but left three years later to form a partnership with brother Frank, who had been working with Frank Furness. "Woodmont" is one of the brothers' greatest achievements.

Wood was a steel baron, possessing a huge fortune and more than 500 acres on the Schuylkill River. As George E. Thomas explained in his Ph.D. dissertation on William Price, Wood's house "was to be built at the very highest point, of the local granite, on foundations blasted out of

the hill, a direct statement of wealth, power, influence, control, and ownership. The result was a lordly and imposing mansion directed towards the public..."¹⁸ "Woodmont" features a giant porte cochere, which projects out from the front of the house and opens into a vestibule connected to a living hall. To the side are parlors, and behind, a carved wood-panelled dining room and study opening into a conservatory with a view to the Wood steel mills. (This view was not accidental--it was achieved through the careful trimming of the forests below).

The massive living hall centers on an immense carved limestone fireplace with a chimney breast which rises to intersect a balcony encircling the inner half of the hall. This room rises more than fifty feet, creating a pyramidal volume on the houses's roof that dominates the exterior of the house. Additionally, a 1908 atlas indicates that the grounds included two lakes, a stream, formal and terraced gardens, aviaries, greenhouses, a pool, a power station, and even an "Indian cave."¹⁹

Of the countless estates that have been demolished, one in particular warrants mention. "Penshurst", the 539-acre estate of Percival Roberts, Jr., was the largest privately-owned property in Lower Merion in its time. Located on both sides of the present Haggy's Ford Road, it extended to

the Schuylkill River. (Illustration 16). Roberts, president of the Pencoyd Iron Works, built "Penshurst" in 1903.²⁰ The estate included a seventy-five room mansion, in the Jacobean mode, and a chapel. There were typical English gardens, and a special rock garden on Conshohocken State Road was a show place with its ornamented fountains, fish pond, balustrades, and terraced stairways. Specimens of every variety of tree that survives in the climate surrounded the main house.²¹

"Penshurst Farm" had a prize herd of imported Ayrshire cattle, as well as pedigreed Berkshire hogs, chickens, and sheep. The barns and dairy were immaculate, and the natural milk was bottled and sold through local distributors. The farmers were considered pioneers in growing fine alfalfa for their cattle. A pump carried water from nearby springs to a water tower near the main house from which the water flowed through the estate's pumping system. A private electrical system lighted the mansion.²²

In 1939, the township made plans to build a trash disposal plant adjacent to his property. Roberts himself then applied for a permit to demolish the mansion, which was sold to a wrecking crew for \$1,000. The contents of the house were sold at auction. When Roberts died in 1943 at the age of eighty-six, the Home Life Insurance Company bought the property and subdivided it for the building of

private homes.²³ Sadly, this scenario became the rule rather than the exception during this century.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. Phyllis C. Maier, Montgomery County: The Second Hundred Years, volume 7 (Norristown, PA, 1983), 306.

2. Carl E. Doebley, Lower Merion: A Portrait (Montgomery County, 1976), 1.

3. Kenneth T. Jackson, Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States (New York, 1985).

4. Maier, 309.

5. E. Digby Baltzell, Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class (New York, 1958), 203.

6. Maier, 320.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Doebley, 6.

10. Betty Floyd, "Story of Maybrook---Part 1" in Main Line Chronicle. 23 February 1956.

11. Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects (Boston, 1985).

12. Arnold Lewis, American Country Houses of the Gilded Age (Mineola, NY, 1982), 20.

13. Maier, 328.

14. Lewis, 20.

15. Maier, 326.

16. Doebley, p.6.

17. Maier, 318.

18. George E. Thomas, "William Price: Builder of Men and Buildings." (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1975), 94.

19. Franklin's Atlas of 1908.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2, continued

20. Maier, 308.

21. Ibid., 323.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

CHAPTER III

SUBURBANIZATION ENCROACHES:

THE BREAK-UP OF THE ESTATES IN LOWER MERION

After World War I, estate-building slowed although many properties were still assembled in the 1920s. The imposition of an income tax in 1916 and the onset of the Depression combined to end effectively the age of the great estate, and the process of abandoning, selling or demolishing the houses and developing their former grounds commenced.¹ Meanwhile, as local train and trolley systems increased their services and roads improved, the middle class exodus from Philadelphia to the suburbs began. This, of course, created a demand for new housing.

The variety of choices available to prospective home-buyers in Lower Merion is seen in the Main Line Residential and Business Directory for 1911-1912 in which a real estate development near the Bala Cynwyd train station offered thirty new houses ranging in price from \$10,000 to \$80,000.² In 1908 and again in 1911, the Lower Merion Realty Company commissioned Walter Mellor and Arthur Meigs to design several modest homes in Bala Cynwyd.

The growing suburbanization and waning exclusiveness of the township is reflected in the fact that in 1936, even the Lower Merion Planning Commission issued a booklet entitled "The Development of Real Estate in Lower Merion Town-

ship" to acquaint those interested in land subdivision with principles that were proving successful at the time.³

In Wynnewood, for example, by 1920, developers such as McIlvain and Company owned many lots and built and sold homes in the \$10,000 range to middle class buyers. This trend in home building persisted, slackening only during the Depression and World War II, when labor and materials were lacking.⁴ Just before the Second War, one of the last open areas in Wynnewood was the Shortridge tract, a 160-acre property. When the war ended there was a building explosion occurred; for instance, 360 single homes were built on the Shortridge tract in the span of a few years.⁵

According to Charles G. Roach, Jr., managing partner of Roach Brothers Realtors, a firm active in residential development in Lower Merion, the sale and development of estates have happened "in a rather steady fashion since World War II, and there may have been more of it going on in the last twenty years."⁶ Former Montgomery County planner Jeroldine Hallberg agrees. Today, "very few [residents] fall into the category of what you would call landed gentry." Most of the large tracts were split in the 1950s and 1960s, and now, according to Hallberg, "we're seeing the subdivision of parcels divided then."⁷

Indeed, by 1970, less than four percent of the township's land was unused or in agricultural use. Neverthe-

less, there were still major undeveloped land holdings in the northeastern portion comprising Villanova, Gladwyne, and Bryn Mawr.⁸ In 1880, 6,287 people lived in the township; in 1980 about nine times that number. The population density in 1884 was 266 persons per square mile; by 1980, it was 2,556.⁹

Table 2 shows quite clearly that while twenty-two estates comprised 100 or more acres in 1908, the peak of the estate-building era, only six remained by 1937, and only three by 1948. Today, there are no 100-acre estates in Lower Merion Township and only three estates (those of Anna Shinn Maier of Bryn Mawr, and John Dorrance Jr. and Walter C. Pew of Gladwyne) of more than fifty acres.

TABLE 2.--Patterns of Change in Estates
of 100 Acres or More in 1908 ¹⁰

	<u>Number of Acres by Year</u>		
	<u>1908</u>	<u>1937</u>	<u>1948</u>
"Bellevue Farm"	100	subdivided	---
"Brookfield Farm"	255	subdivided	---
"Brynntyddyn"	115	15	15
"Camp Discharge"	184	128	100
"Clairemont"	156	158	158
"Clover Hill"	173	171	subdivided
"Dolobran"	146	4	4
"Dipple"	100	subdivided	---
"Green Hill Farm"	170	subdivided	---
"Harriton"	145	175	174
"Highland Farm"	100	80	subdivided
"Idylwild Farm"	167	70	70
"Northwick"	164	32	32
"Pembroke Farm"	109	8	subdivided
"Pencoyd Farm"	111	31	under subdivision
"Penshurst"	564	539	subdivided
"Pleasant View Farm"	135	14	14
"Soapstone Farm"	130	6	14
"The Red Rose"	243	194	subdivided
"Waverly Heights"	103	93	55
"Woodmont Park"	100	74	74

Today, houses and lots still remain large in Gladwyne, Bryn Mawr, and Villanova, although estates are constantly being subdivided. A study of a 1984 atlas reveals that only twenty-seven properties of ten or more acres and twenty-nine properties between five and ten acres survive. Table 3 shows the location of these Lower Merion properties.¹¹

TABLE 3.--Location and Number of Privately Owned Tracts in Lower Merion Township of Five Acres or More in 1984 ¹²

Gladwyne	18
Bryn Mawr	12
Villanova	10
Wynnewood	7
Penn Valley	5
Ardmore	2
Bala Cynwyd	1
Haverford	1

Table 4 summarizes the name of the owner, name of the estate if one exists, town in which it is located, and amount of acreage of the estates of five acres or more in Lower Merion Township. As the information is based on a 1984 atlas, some estates may have been subdivided since then.

TABLE 4--Privately Owned Estates of Five Acres
or More in Lower Merion Township in 1984 ¹³

<u>OWNER</u>	<u>ESTATE</u>	<u>ACREAGE</u>
1. Pew, Walter	"Rolling Hill Farm"	104
2. Dorrance, John C.		59
3. Maier, Anna Shinn	"Harriton"	55
4. Johnson, E. R. F.		41
5. Edwards, Mrs. Arthur	"Afterall"	33
6. Elliott, William		31
7. Merriam, Jack	"Maybrook"	26
8. Saunders, Dorothy	"Idlewild"	26
9. Friedman, Milton		23
10. Madeira, Louis		21
11. Philler, Eleanor		21
12. Davis, Mary		20
13. McLean, E. B.		20
14. Allen, Charles		20
15. Read, R. B.	"Bryntyddyn"	18
16. Winsor, William	"Hedgely"	18
17. Breyer, Henry		18
18. Dietrich, William	"Sanderling"	18
19. Perkins, Emily		16
20. Tyson, John		15
21. McNeely, George		14

TABLE 4--continued

<u>OWNER</u>	<u>ESTATE</u>	<u>ACREAGE</u>
22. Vanderbilt, O. De Gray		14
23. Pew, Alberta	"Rockycrest"	13
24. Goodfarb, Louis		13
25. Tredennick, William		13
26. MacIntosh, W. J.		12
27. Elliott, William		12
28. Rosengarten, A. H.		11
29. Fuller, Mae	"Deanewood"	11
30. Henry, Josephine		10
31. Annenberg, Walter	"Inwood"	9
32. Denison, J. Morga	"Briar Hill"	8
33. Satinsky, Robin	"Donglomur"	8
34. Ott, J. R.		8
35. Lewis, S. H.	"Woodley"	8
36. Wood, John	"Meadowbank"	7
37. Pew, Walter		7
38. Butcher, Howard		7
39. McIlvain, E. L.		7
40. Tartarian, Araxy	"Dove Mill House"	7
41. Fitler, William		6
42. Harper, J. M.		6
43. Reuss, Katherine	"Peny Bryn"	6

TABLE 4--continued

<u>OWNER</u>	<u>ESTATE</u>	<u>ACREAGE</u>
44. Kuback, Richard	"Wooded Hill"	6
45. Rauch, F. B.		6
46. Spiesman, Marjorie		5
47. Lownsbury, Elizabeth		5
48. Clarke, Rhoda	"Windswept"	5
49. Reichel, Frank	"Framar"	5
50. Mitchell, J. Kearsley		5
51. Sharples, Lawrence		5
52. De Sherbinin, Albert		5
53. Dimson, Irving	"Hampton House"	5
54. Scheetz, William	"Kimberlea"	5
55. Archer, John Hoffman		5
56. Smoger, B. and M.		5

Thus, of the dozens of estates that existed at the peak of the estate-building era at the turn of the century, only 56 remain, more than half of which comprise less than ten acres. These estates total 857 acres, have an average size of 17.14 acres and a median size of thirteen acres.

There are several reasons for this dramatic transformation in land use in the township. First, most estates were labor-intensive with large indoor and outdoor staffs devoted to the care and maintenance of the main house, contents, grounds, and outbuildings. With the sharp decline in immigration after World War II, the changing attitudes of American labor toward service employment and the increasing unionization of labor have risen while willingness to work on estates in paternalistic relationships has diminished.¹⁴ Second, rising costs of maintenance have matched rising labor costs. Residences meant to be expensive even in a day of inexpensive materials have become almost prohibitive to operate and repair.¹⁵

Third, taxes--income, estate and inheritance, and property--have also caused financial drains on the estate owner. It is increasingly difficult to pay inheritance taxes, satisfy the demands of growing numbers of heirs and simultaneously maintain a large property intact. The land is often taxed on its best use--its potential for residential subdivision under local zoning ordinances--raising its

value to unsupportable levels and forcing the owner to divide and sell, especially after a death.¹⁶

Finally, lifestyles and social attitudes have also changed. The large upper class family unit with several generations living together has become the exception, and the retinue of servants and retainers that accompany it has almost passed. Family members in recent generations often scatter across the country, rejecting the patrician surroundings of their grandparents and resenting the time and responsibility it takes to administer an estate on which they have no desire to reside.¹⁷ Huyler C. Held, President of the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, explains:

The owners are often old and yearn for a smaller and more compact establishment. The children are dispersed, have their own places and for one reason or another reject the whole concept of maintaining a monument to an out-of-date lifestyle, particularly where this causes problems in meeting family needs.¹⁸

Charles Roach emphasizes, "It is the ability to maintain a 100-acre property that's more and more difficult when combined with its increasing value over the last twenty years." Roach said that the area, long a popular residential retreat, has made gains in recent years because of the arrival of "world-class office space" to the nearby boom areas of King of Prussia and Great Valley.¹⁹ Partly because of this, local government planners and real estate

officials estimate that vacant land in Lower Merion is worth between \$200,000 and \$250,000 an acre, depending on improvements.²⁰ Obviously, there is great incentive to sell.²¹

The gradual but steady progression of change can be seen in the history of "Pencoyd," a Bala Cynwyd estate of 150 acres first settled by John Roberts in 1683 but extensively altered and expanded by Frank Furness. (Illustrations 17, 18). Pencoyd remained a working farm until 1929 and retained its rural setting through World War II. But by the close of the 1950s, all of the land descended to heirs or was sold, leaving only about twenty acres, bordered by City Line Avenue, actually belonging to the estate. The mansion was finally demolished in 1967 to make way for the Decker Square shopping center.²²

Continued use of a building for its original purpose is frequently the most desirable and successful means of preservation, but it is obvious that this is becoming increasingly unfeasible with large estates because of economic pressures and societal changes. As a result of the inability of their owners to maintain them in light of steadily rising costs and development pressures, the role of the estates of Lower Merion has been forced to change out of necessity.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. Phyllis C. Maier, Montgomery County: The Second Hundred Years (Montgomery County, PA, 1976), 308.

2. Ibid.

3. Plan for Lower Merion Township (Montgomery County, PA, 1937).

4. Maier, 327.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. "Fading Glory: Fewer Great Estates Able to Pay Price of Greatness," Philadelphia Inquirer, 23 January 1986, Neighbors Section, 3.

8. Ibid, 2.

9. Guidelines for Residential Development: An Element of the Montgomery Comprehensive Plan (Montgomery County, PA, 1978), A-52.

10. Ibid.

11. These figures were compiled from Franklin's Atlas of 1984.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. William C. Shopsin and Grania Bolton Marcus, Saving Large Estates: Conservation, Historic Preservation, Adaptive Reuse (Setauket, NY, 1977), 6.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 6-7.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III, continued

19. Huyler Held in William C. Shopsin and Grania Bolton Marcus, Saving Large Estates: Conservation, Historic Preservation, Adaptive Reuse (Setauket, NY, 1977).

20. "Fading Glory: Fewer Great Estates Able to Pay Price of Greatness," Philadelphia Inquirer, 23 January 1986, Neighbors Section, 4.

21. Ibid.

22. Interview with Sandra Handford, Director of the Lower Merion Planning Department, 1 October 1986.

CHAPTER IV

DEALING WITH CHANGE: INSTITUTIONS AND SUBDIVISION

"Maybrook," the Wynnewood estate described in Chapter II, is one of the most significant Lower Merion estates to have survived to this day as a single-family home. Even at "Maybrook," however, adaptations have been made. When owner Henry Gibson died, it was left to his daughter who was then only twenty-two. In the 1930s, part of the land surrounding the house was given to the township to create a parking lot for the nearby Wynnewood train station.

During the housing shortage of World War II, Mary Gibson moved into the estate's carriage house and allowed six GIs and their families to live in the main house. Ten acres, and then another seventeen, were sold to Jack Merriam, who then built the adjacent Thomas Wynne Apartments. Miss Gibson, who continued to live in the carriage house, finally sold "Maybrook" to Merriam in 1956 when she was eighty-one. Merriam still owns the mansion and twenty-six acres that remain, but has closed off the first floor and resides above.

The situation at "Maybrook," in which the mansion remains in private hands, well-preserved and still surrounded by a large tract of land, is very unusual. More traditionally, owners have solved the problem of how to dispose of their estates in two different ways. One approach has been

to donate the estate to a worthy institution such as a religious or private school, usually with an endowment for support. This method serves to remove the property from the tax rolls.¹ The Lower Main Line YMCA, for instance, is currently investigating the possibility of relocating to "Maybrook" because of its shortage of space and the obvious desirability the estate's twenty-six acres provide.

The Northeastern Christian Junior College in Rosemont uses a mansion designed by Horace Trumbauer as its central building, Boone Hall. "Clairemont Farm," once surrounded by 250 acres, was designed by Trumbauer in 1910 for Joseph Gillingham. (Illustration 19). Morris L. Clothier, head of the Strawbridge and Clothier department store chain, owned the estate from 1922 to 1947.² Now on a twenty-four acre tract, "Clairemont Farm" was purchased in 1957 by members of the Churches of Christ, a group which maintains it adequately and has made few changes, except adding a ramp for the handicapped, to its exterior.

Isaac Clothier, a member of the same family, built "Ballytore" in Wynnewood in 1881. (Illustration 20). It remained his home until 1933, when it was sold to the Agnes Irwin School for Girls.³ In 1962, the building became the Armenian Church of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob and a poorly-designed annex was added. Most recently, the house's original porte cochere was demolished. (Illustration 21).

The examples of institutional conversions in Lower Merion Township are numerous. The Wistar Morris mansion, "Green Hills," was adapted to serve as the campus of the Friends Central School. A hotel, Green Hill Farms, now the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, occupied a portion of the land. "Rathalla," the Joseph Sinnott house discussed previously, since 1924 has thrived as the centerpiece of the Rosemont College campus. Two neighboring mansions are used for the school and convent of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. One of these, on Montgomery Avenue, was formerly the William Joyce residence, designed in 1891 by T. P. Chandler. (Illustration 22).

"Woodmont," the William Price-designed estate in Gladwyne, was purchased in 1929 by J. Hector McNeal, a corporation lawyer and noted horseman, who modernized it. By 1953, the house was vacant and the land reduced to seventy-three acres. It was sold for \$75,000 to Father Divine's Palace Mission Movement, renamed "Mount of the House of the Lord," and designated world headquarters of the movement.⁴ Mother Divine, who lives at "Woodmont," and a small number of followers of her late husband anticipate that the "Second Coming" will take place at the estate. Happily, the house is superbly maintained and appears much as it did during McNeal's ownership.

However, difficulties with the conversion from private home to institutional headquarters can arise. First, the structure may undergo changes to both the interior and exterior which allow it to adapt to the institution's needs but threaten its architectural integrity. Second, the concept of appropriate use is nebulous. For example, even though a proposed institutional adaptation may require no major structural changes and may best preserve the architectural character of the property and its landscaped surroundings, the neighbors may find it totally unacceptable--a potential threat to their property values and an unfortunate precedent in the community.⁵

This conflict occurred on the ninety-acre Foerderer tract in Gladwyne, part of the former 250-acre estate of leather tycoon Percival Foerderer, who in the 1920s built his hacienda-like mansion, "La Ronda." It was left to nearby Villanova University with the intention that the house be used as a conference center. The plans were abandoned, however, because of overwhelming neighborhood objection to the increased traffic and activity that would have resulted.⁶ In this situation, what may have been appropriate in preservation terms was not appropriate in a social sense.

More problematic is the fact that institutional use is clearly not a feasible solution for every remaining estate;

there are more estates than there are institutions able to assume the exorbitant cost of their upkeep. Local governments can no longer rely on schools, religious groups, and other institutions to assume the burden of sustaining these properties. Furthermore, the institutionalization of an estate is only a temporary solution. The Palace Mission movement which uses "Woodmont" as its headquarters, for instance, faces a steady decline in its membership. What plans now exist for the inevitable vacancy of this house and grounds? The answer, alarmingly, is none.

The second common method of breaking up estates involves selling off the acreage surrounding the house for residential subdivision or commercial use, while retaining the main residence on a reduced plot. (Illustration 23). The conventional subdivision into parcels suitable for single-family homes, described in the previous chapter, was, in the past, the only option to those interested in this method.

Selling the land for subdivision, however, often threatens the character of both the community and the house itself. As William Shopsisin explains, "succumbing to the temptation to consider the mansion a white elephant and carving out the surrounding acreage often leaves the main house stranded on a plot of land too small to do its size any justice."⁷ Piecemeal subdivision without adequate

consideration given to design controls, site placement, choice of materials and quality of construction can often result in exploitive tract housing or an odd assortment of new structures encroaching on the original mansion to the detriment of the entire ensemble.⁸

In 1973, Lower Merion Township enacted a Planned Residential Development (P.R.D) amendment to its zoning code in an effort to prevent the sprawl that can result from conventional subdivision and instead encourage well-planned developments on tracts of fifty acres or more. In 1980, the township approved plans by the Realty Engineering Company to build the first P.R.D., a cluster of 107 townhouses, each to cost about \$275,000, adjacent to "La Ronda," the Foerderer house off Mount Pleasant Road in Gladwyne. (Illustration 24).

Though in principle, planned development is preferable to conventional, haphazard subdivision, serious problems still arose. Because the condominiums are clustered together, large portions of the land remain as open space. Yet the development that resulted, the "Hermitage," is disappointing in its integration of the new townhouses with the existing Foerderer house. Architecturally, no attempt is made to create either a successful cohesion or dialogue between old and new. The new homes are stylistically nondescript where they might have referred--through mate-

rials, scale, and architectural details--to "La Ronda."

More alarming, however, was the disregard for the existing landscape which allowed virtually all of the estate's trees to be cut down. In their place, giant boulders were substituted, and the essential character of the estate's natural landscape was lost. (Illustration 25). When driving through this area, one has the curious sensation of being in a misplaced suburban neighborhood in the Southwest rather than in Main Line Philadelphia. Somewhat ironically, Hal Davis of Realty Engineering Company describes the Hermitage as offering "the quality, amenities and privacy of a Main Line mansion on a smaller scale."⁹

Another recently completed P.R.D. is "Wrenfield" on Spring Mill Road in Bryn Mawr. The site is one on which Dr. and Mrs. Frank Ryckel reside in "Framar," a Jacobean-mode home which was originally the estate of the Luden (cough drop) family. (Illustration 26). Here, the overall scheme, again with clustered luxury houses, is far more effective in its integration of new construction adjacent to the existing mansion. There are several reasons for its success.

First, the Ryckel family took an active role in preserving the integrity of their property by collaborating with the architect, landscape architect and developer, the Lishon Construction Company. The Ryckels' arrangement in-

cluded provisions that they would retain "Framar" on a five-acre tract and that few trees and other natural features of the landscape would be destroyed to construct the new homes.¹⁰ (Illustration 27).

Additionally, the homes closest to the Ryckel house are attached so that their overall scale is consistent with the great scale of the house; the smaller, single-family detached homes are further removed from "Framar." Finally, the homes, which are priced at \$500,000 and up, are designed with materials and a general form which complement the Ryckel home. The roof pitch, fenestration and other architectural treatments allow the new homes to coexist in an arrangement that flatters both the old and the new. (Illustration 28).

An alternate provision that Lower Merion Township has added to its zoning code is the option for developers to construct what is known as a life-care community. Life-care communities for the elderly, which require substantial entry fees and additional monthly fees, provide housing, meals, activities, and, if the resident becomes ill, long-term nursing care at no extra charge. There are about 700 such communities around the country, but the largest concentration--thirty-six--is in the Philadelphia region.¹¹

Two of these facilities are located in Lower Merion Township and both utilize estates as their development

site. The older of the two, "Waverly Heights," takes its name from the estate on which it was built, the 103-acre Gladwyne property of Pennsylvania Railroad president Samuel Rea. In 1982, then-owner Ruth Junkin sold the entire estate to the developers of the life-care facility.

The developers of "Waverly Heights" have very effectively used the mansion as a community center for the residents. Because of the placement of the new buildings, to the side and rear of the house, and the house's location--the first building one encounters when arriving by car--the house maintains a prominent role by serving as a center and a symbolic home for the facility as a whole. (Illustration 29). Further, the house remains essentially unchanged on the exterior with the new facilities discreetly attached, using similar materials and scale. Like "Wrenfield," the new buildings were designed in a manner sympathetic to the house with many of the existing trees retained. (Illustration 30).

Another life-care complex currently under construction, on the other hand, exploits unnecessarily the estate on which it is located. "Beaumont" in Bryn Mawr was the 1912 mansion of another Pennsylvania Railroad president, William L. Austin. (Illustration 31). Conveying stability and massiveness in its stony exterior, it is a quintessential Gilded Age mansion. The magnificent interior still fea-

tures built-in carved furniture, original light fixtures, and frescoed walls and ceilings which are in dire need of restoration. The music room contains a pipe organ.

Inexplicably, the developer, Arthur Wheeler, has endorsed a design for his complex which will irrevocably destroy rather than enhance the Austin mansion. Where he could have created a meaningful center for the facility by capitalizing on the existing house, as achieved at "Waverly Heights," the Austin house is instead surrounded on all sides by new construction, and all but invisible from the exterior. (Illustration 32). Unsympathetic additions and a non-hierarchical layout of the new housing units have obliterated the original integrity and siting of the once-grand home. (Illustration 33).

Construction at the site, which was heavily wooded, (illustration 34) began in 1986 and is scheduled for completion in the fall of 1987. The thick forest that once covered the property has been almost completely cut down; according to Wheeler, thirty acres of trees were removed to clear the site for construction.¹² Like "Waverly Heights," the house itself will become a community center for the residents. What remains to be seen is to what extent the interior spaces will be restored. Currently, many of the rooms are serving as storage areas for the construction supplies, a use which has seriously damaged

many of the wood floors. Clearly, this development is not being executed with sensitivity and respect to the Austin estate.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

1. William C. Shopsin and Grania Bolton Marcus, Saving Large Estates: Conservation, Historic Preservation, Adaptive Reuse (Setauket, NY, 1977), 7.
2. Phyllis C. Maier, Montgomery County: The Next Two Hundred Years (Montgomery County, PA, 1977), 327.
3. Ibid., 328.
4. Ibid., 318.
5. Shopsin and Marcus, 32.
6. Maier, 319.
7. Shopsin and Marcus, 7.
8. Ibid.
9. Philadelphia Inquirer, 17 October 1986, 15.
10. Interview with Sandra Handford, Director of the Lower Merion Township Planning Department, 1 October 1986.
11. "A Growing Role for Life-care Communities," Philadelphia Inquirer, 15 January 1987, 2.
12. Interview with Arthur Wheeler, October 1986.

CHAPTER V

PRESERVATION POLICY IN LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP

In 1939, the Lower Merion Planning Commission wrote, "The charm of the township is in its open character. Wise planning will help to retain this charm even though the density of population is considerably increased."¹ The solutions described in the preceding chapter indicate that the land use planning and preservation techniques currently available do not adequately protect the few properties which remain. An analysis of the solutions which have been employed in the past--institutionalization as with "Woodmont", allowing the free marketplace to control development, as with "Pencoyd", or imposing limited restrictions on development, as at "Beaumont"--can only lead to the conclusion that they are not consistently adequate in ensuring the welfare of the estates.

What is needed is the implementation by the township of creative but focused solutions which relieve the owners of the burden of the estate while simultaneously preserving the character, architectural integrity and local traditions of their properties. It is important to examine the tools currently available to Lower Merion Township in greater detail in order to understand their inadequacy in protecting the local Gilded Age estates.

In general, local government's role in historic preservation takes one of two forms. It can be a direct exercise of the government's police powers, as with an historic district ordinance, or it can provide incentives for historic preservation, such as through special zoning provisions. Historic district laws have been the most visible form of local regulation in recent years.² Pennsylvania enacted a statewide historic district enabling act in 1961. Act 167 authorizes all municipalities to create historic districts within their boundaries and to appoint boards of historical architectural review to oversee "the erection, reconstruction, alteration, restoration, demolition, or razing" of buildings within the districts.³

Lower Merion currently has three historic districts--Harriton in Bryn Mawr and Mill Creek and Merion Square in Gladwyne. Its Board of Historical Architectural Review (BOHAR), a seven-member board appointed in 1980 by the township's Board of Commissioners, is responsible for reviewing exterior change, signage, and new construction to structures within the districts. Recommendations of the Board are considered by the township's Building and Planning Commission.

The Board of Historical Architectural Review is presently compiling an inventory of historic structures within the township, using the same criteria adopted by the

National Register of Historic Places.⁴ Surveys such as this can act as a crucial historic preservation tool by discovering and promoting public awareness of overlooked estates and by aiding the Planning Commission in establishing its comprehensive planning and zoning. A community that has both surveyed and established priorities for its resources is better equipped to make intelligent decisions about public expenditures to preserve these resources. Yet Lower Merion Review Board Chairman Robert De Silets admits that because of a lack of manpower, the township's resources are not yet exhaustively surveyed.⁵ The result is that many of the Gilded Age estates are not listed, although clearly, many would qualify based on the National Register criteria.

The estates listed on neither the local nor National Registers include "Afterall," the Arthur Edwards house surrounded by thirty-two acres in Rosemont, "La Ronda," the Foerderer mansion in Gladwyne, "Framar," the Reichel house in Bryn Mawr, and "Bryntydden," a house near "Woodmont" in Gladwyne built by another member of the Wood family. The omission of these and other mansions allows them to exist unrecognized both by the public and by legislators.

Another serious shortcoming with the existing legislation is that most architecturally significant buildings do not lie within geographically-defined historic districts. Gilded Age estates are scattered throughout Lower Merion,

yet enabling legislation does not allow the municipality to protect individual landmarks. Until the necessary legislation is enacted, no township agency has the authorization to designate individual landmarks to control their preservation.⁶

Furthermore, the establishment of historic district controls allows a municipality like Lower Merion to overlook a fundamental item: the appropriateness of its underlying zoning code to the achievement of historic preservation objectives. As stated in the Brandywine Conservancy's Protecting Historic Properties,

Historic preservation has rarely been addressed in suburban areas in the zoning code revision process. As a consequence, municipal officials are often reluctant to allow changes to accommodate a particular property owner when there is inadequate time to consider long-term ramifications.⁷

If a thorough historic survey were reviewed during the updating of comprehensive plans and of zoning codes, appropriate zoning regulations could then be drafted.

Zoning, of course, is the tool most widely used in suburban communities to regulate land use. Lower Merion's zoning ordinance, originally written in 1927, was comprehensively revised in 1979. It provides for ten residential zones, ranging in density from .4 units per acre (R-AA) to 17.4 units per acre (R-7). Nearly all of the remaining estates of five acres or more are in zones of R-A or R-AA,

the two highest categories.⁸

Lower Merion planners restrict development through zoning ordinances which confine commercial buildings to Lancaster Avenue and City Line Avenue, while devoting Montgomery Avenue west of Narberth to apartment houses and townhouses. To allow for the reuse of mansions which are too large for single-family use, the township does allow, by special exception, division of a dwelling into more than one dwelling unit--even in an area that only permits construction of single-family detached dwellings. For the same reason, institutions are also permitted by special exception in residential areas.

But because this provision is allowed by special exception, rather than by right, the burden of proof is on the developer to prove that the conversion is not contrary to public interest.⁹ Obviously, developers are dissuaded from attempting such a conversion if each time they are forced to challenge the neighbors, often hostile and in great numbers, who fear that the conversion will lower their property values, create traffic problems, and encourage habitation by college students from nearby universities.

Planned residential development, discussed in the last chapter, allows for cluster development on parcels of land with a minimum of twenty-five acres. It usually serves as

a means of preserving more open space and natural amenities than would single-family developments. In February of 1987, however, a special ad hoc zoning committee of the Lower Merion Township Board of Commissioners approved changes to the zoning codes that will reduce the density for planned residential developments.

Under prior density rules, developers who built multifamily projects were permitted 1.25 units per acre in both the R-A and R-AA zones. For single-family houses, the R-A zones allowed one unit per acre; in the R-AA zone two acres per house were required. It was felt that as a result, developers were encouraged to build pockets of dense multifamily housing in areas, particularly in Gladwyne, characterized by single-family houses on large tracts.¹⁰ Under the new regulations, the density will remain the same in the R-A district, but will be reduced by nearly half in the R-AA zones. In adopting a new formula to determine the density of multifamily developments, the board reduced the number of units permitted in the large open areas of the township. The new formula does, however, include a twenty-five percent density bonus for multifamily construction over what would be permitted for single-family homes.

Those on the Board cited stopping the development of estates in ways consistent with the zoning, but uncharac-

teristic of the neighborhood, as a motivating factor in changing the ordinance,¹¹ but curiously, the Board of Historical Architectural Review played no part, even in an advisory capacity, in the zoning change process. At no time was its historic structures inventory ever evaluated.¹² Additionally, several developers say that the new density reductions will only serve to discourage developers from creating multifamily houses.

Peter Simone, a land planner representing Walter Pew, whose 104-acre Gladwyne estate is the township's largest privately-owned undeveloped tract, said that the multifamily provisions are now overly restrictive.¹³ Overly restrictive zoning may prevent the creative reuse of large estates or the innovative development of the property. A one-acre subdivision designed without regard to the original landscaping features and the natural contours of the property may be much more destructive of the character of the original estate and community than a well-planned, but denser, cluster development.¹⁴

Thus, while historic neighborhoods in cities often have problems relating to permissive zoning codes which allow overly intensive use of buildings, it is ironic that quite the opposite problem arises in suburban communities such as Lower Merion, where the zoning is overly restrictive. A nonresidential use that would permit rehabilita-

tion of the buildings and grounds with only minimal impact on the neighborhood is not permitted by right in the zoning code. Similarly, where the only economically feasible means of restoring a "white elephant" mansion is by splitting it into several dwelling units, zoning regulations discourage conversions of this type.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER V

1. Plan for Lower Merion Township (Montgomery County, PA, April 1937).
2. Protecting Historic Properties: A Guide to Research and Preservation (Chadds Ford, PA, 1984), 80.
3. Ibid.
4. Historical and Architectural Inventory: List of Accepted Resources (Lower Merion Township, 1987).
5. Interview with Robert De Silets, Chairman, Lower Merion Township Board of Historical Architectural Review, 2 March 1987.
6. House Bill 1308, enabling municipalities to designate individual landmarks, was defeated in 1985. Lower Merion Township's HAARB could, however, propose the creation of a thematic historic district, the theme being "Gilded Age Estates."
7. Protecting Historic Properties: A Guide to Research and Preservation.
8. Zoning and Zoning Hearing Board (Code of the Township of Lower Merion, 1986), chaps. 155 and A 172.
9. Ibid.
10. "Changes to Zoning Code Could Limit Development," Philadelphia Inquirer, February 1986.
11. "Ad Hoc Zoning Committee Sets Goals," Main Line Times, 25 September 1986, 3.
12. Interview with Robert De Silets, 2 March 1987.
13. Philadelphia Inquirer, February 1987.
14. William C. Shopsin and Grania Bolton Marcus, Saving Large Estates: Conservation, Historic Preservation, Adaptive Reuse (Setauket, NY, 1977).

CONCLUSION:

PRESERVATION STRATEGIES TO GUIDE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

It is clear that many of the few remaining Gilded Age estates are highly significant elements of the architectural and historical heritage of Lower Merion Township. Their preservation is of critical and immediate importance as their numbers rapidly dwindle. Yet as William C. Shop-sin explains in his Saving Large Estates,

Sophisticated urban planning concepts and complex design control mechanisms are often anathema to suburban and rural communities. Yet the residents of such communities may also express considerable alarm at the urban sprawl and speculation afflicting the once bucolic and sparsely populated countryside. Many fiercely independent suburban residents cling to the conviction that the rights of property are inviolate...and may not understand that unfettered privatism and lack of regulation have contributed to the result they deplore. If we are to achieve any success in saving large estates, much of the traditional antipathy of small communities to planning and controls will have to be modified.¹

The existing zoning and historic preservation mechanisms in Lower Merion Township are plagued by the problems he describes. The various local controls are not coordinated to the common goal of safeguarding the welfare of some of Lower Merion's most valuable resources, its country estates. What is needed is a provision in the existing zoning code which directly confronts the problem of what to do with the few remaining large properties.

An examination of the different methods of reuse leads to the conclusion that the best hope for these grand homes, which have outlived their use as single-family residences, is to convert them into multi-family dwellings. As indicated in the last chapter, conversion of estates for institutional use, such as schools and life-care facilities, is not a realistic solution for the plight of every large estate.

Instead, condominium conversions must be promoted. In order to illustrate the potential of this method, the third largest privately-owned tract in the township serves as an excellent example. The parents-in-law of architectural historian George E. Thomas live with their siblings at "Harriton" (illustration 35), a fifty-five acre Bryn Mawr estate off Old Gulph Road (of no connection to the "Harriton Historic District", also in Bryn Mawr). All those now living at "Harriton" are approaching old age, and Dr. Thomas says that none of the next generation has a desire to bear the burden of maintaining the estate. He believes that the main house, which has eighteen rooms, might lend itself to being divided into three condominiums, each with two or three bedrooms. Other units could be added away from the main house, and the existing outbuildings, including a barn, could be converted into facilities shared in common by the residents.

Conversions of this type have been successfully achieved in many communities, including Chestnut Hill in northwest Philadelphia, where a 1883 Wilson Eyre-designed house, "Anglecot," the Charles Potter residence, was divided into condominiums by developer Richard Snowden. From the exterior, the house remains essentially unaltered from its appearance as a single-family dwelling. Attached garages added behind complement the Shingle Style mode of the house. Only on its interior does one discover that the house, because of a well-planned and well-executed conversion, has a renewed purpose for the future.

One of the first mansions where this type of conversion was successfully treated is "Guernsey Hall," a Princeton, New Jersey mansion designed by John Notman. "Guernsey Hall" came up for sale in 1970 after the death of its last private owner. Architect William Short believed that a multiple dwelling would be the most feasible way to save the landmark, and he formed a corporation with eight other investors called Guernsey Hall, Inc., with the intent of purchasing the property for conversion to a multifamily dwelling under a condominium form of ownership.

The mansion is located in an area of Princeton zoned for single-family detached houses on large lots, and there were complaints that the condominiums would be the catalyst for turning other large and historic houses into apart-

ments--a precedent which some neighbors felt would begin the area's decline. Nevertheless, Short was able to convince the local zoning board that his development plan for the mansion merited a zoning variance, and Guernsey Hall, Inc. took possession in 1972.²

The two overriding design objectives of Short, who served as architect for his own project, were to save the residence and keep as many of the original details as possible.³ Interior reconstruction consisted of dividing the forty-two rooms into six apartments. The last unit was occupied in July 1974. With the exception of improved main entrance security, an elevator and two new garages, the mansion looks much as it did at the turn of the century. Situated on an extensively landscaped site, the mansion contains parking for residents and guests and a formal garden. The garden, which is held in common by the residents, is maintained by a caretaker. No trees were removed, so the site remains heavily wooded.

By all accounts the conversion has been a success. Even taxes collected at "Guernsey Hall" exceed the taxes that would be levied if five single-family houses had instead been built. In addition, the reuse plan created less of a burden on city services, such as roads and sewers, than would have five single-family dwellings.⁴

In order to encourage and facilitate conversions of

this type in Lower Merion, there could be a clear-cut provision incorporated into the code, perhaps called an "Historic Structure Planned Residential Development Ordinance," which provides for special subdivision of certain historically-significant houses and their grounds of five acres or more. The determination as to which estates are worthy of this treatment could be based on the National Register criteria which are already used by the local Board of Historical Architectural Review.

Once this designation has been made, the zoning code could allow, by right, the dividing up of the mansions into multiple dwellings, each with independent mechanical systems and proper fireproofing, and the carefully controlled development of the surrounding grounds. General criteria followed by the legislative body charged with overseeing the development could comprise these points: the changes to the estate must be as invisible as possible, the design of new units should be compatible with the old, and new materials should blend sympathetically with the old.⁵

There could also be strictly controlled requirements as to the density of the new units and their placement in relation to the main house, to ensure that enough space remains to preserve the house's character. The ordinance must encourage the reuse of as many of the estate's out-buildings as possible and the placement of any new housing

near the perimeter of the tract. The extent to which trees are allowed to be razed to construct the new units could also be stipulated.

Part of the income derived from the development could be designated toward endowing the house, and the condominium owners could share an interest in the land surrounding it. The value of the new units can be required to be comparable to the value of adjacent houses so that neighboring property values would not be adversely affected. Additionally, facade and open space easements could be arranged with such easement-holding organizations as the Brandywine Conservancy and the Natural Lands Trust.

In summary, then, Lower Merion Township must:

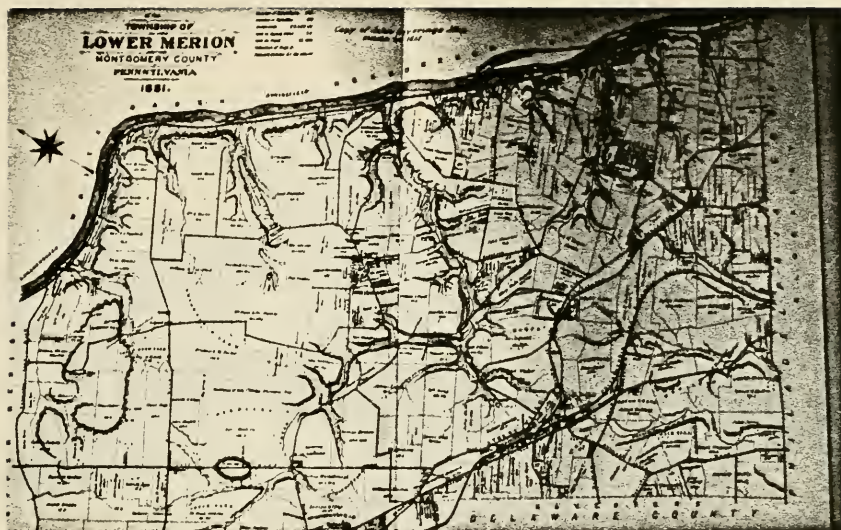
1. recognize significant estates by adding them to its Historic Structures Inventory and possibly creating a thematic "Gilded Age Estate Historic District;"
2. evaluate the solutions outlined above for the reuse of those estates that are susceptible to development pressures, and propose these solutions to estate-owners and developers;
3. prepare an amendment to its zoning ordinance; and
4. educate the community about the cultural significance of its mansions and open spaces.

The time has come for Lower Merion Township, like a rising number of municipalities faced with similar situations, to recognize the value of one of its chief cultural resources: its Gilded Age estates. These mansions and great tracts of open space gave "Main Line" Lower Merion its distinctive character and reputation--a reputation which has encouraged its appeal and current development pressures. The Gilded Age estates endow their landscape with great richness; they must not be allowed to be swallowed up by suburbanization.

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. William C. Shopsin and Grania Bolton Marcus, Saving Large Estates: Conservation, Historic Preservation, Adaptive Reuse (Setauket, NY, 1977), 32.
2. "Economic Analyses of Adaptive Use Projects: Guernsey Hall." Information pamphlet, National Trust for Historic Preservation. Washington, D.C., 1976.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Shopsin and Marcus, 32.

ILLUSTRATIONS



1. JOHN LEVERING'S 1851 MAP OF LOWER MERION TOWNSHIP.
The boundary dividing Lower Merion from Philadelphia is at extreme right.



2. PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD OFFICIALS, 1901.
Top left: Alexander Cassatt of "Cheswold." Bottom left: Samuel Rea of "Waverly Heights."



3. CHESWOLD, Alexander Cassatt residence, Haverford, Pa. Demolished.



4. DOLOBRAN, Clement Griscom residence, Haverford, Pa.



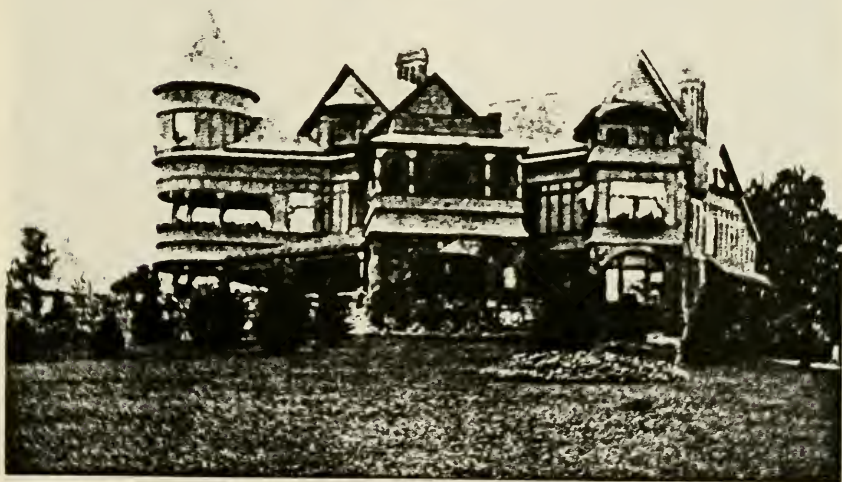
5. TY'N-Y-COED, Effingham Morris residence, Ardmore, Pa.



6. RESTROVER, Samuel B. Brown residence, Haverford, Pa. Demolished.



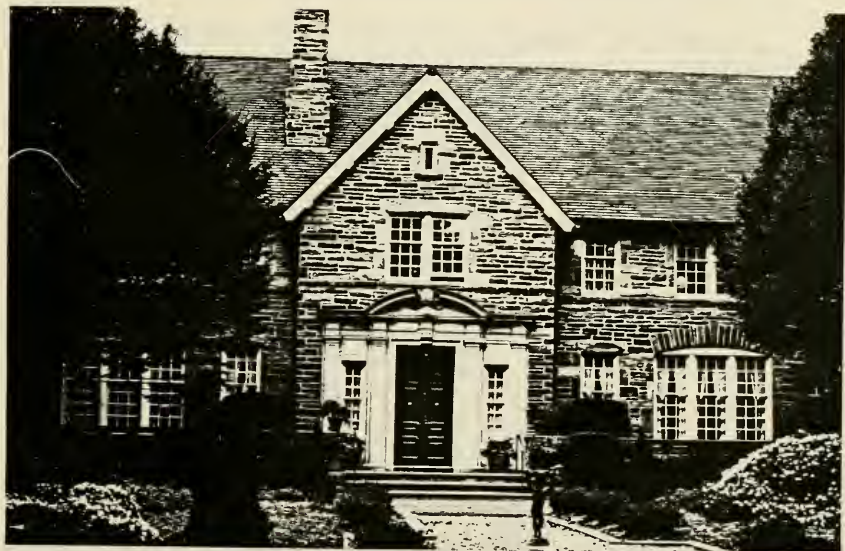
7. INGEBOG, William Simpson Jr. residence, Wynnewood, Pa. Demolished.



8. REDSTONE, Rosemont, Pa., 1901. Demolished.



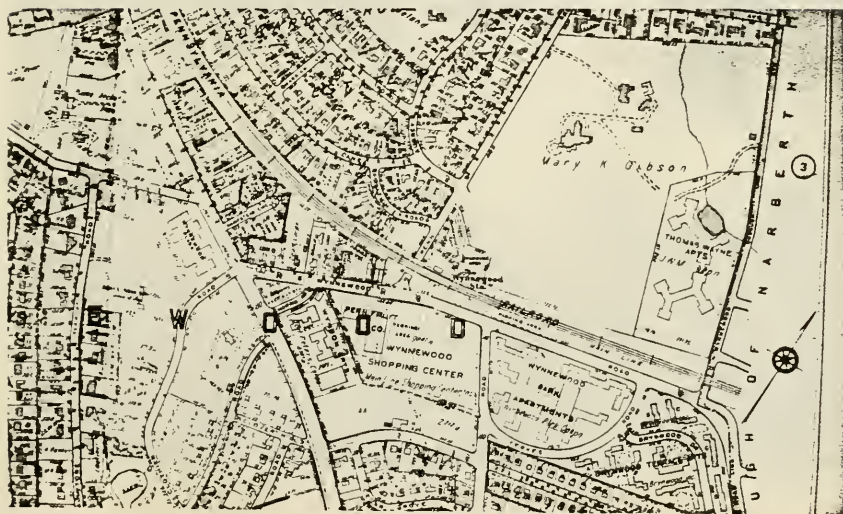
9. LA RONDA, Percival Foerderer residence, Gladwyne, Pa.



10. WAVERLY HEIGHTS, Samuel Rea residence, Gladwyne, Pa.



11. MAYBROOK, Henry Gibson residence, Wynnewood, Pa., 1886.



12. 1946 ATLAS VIEW OF MAYBROOK, Wynnewood, Pa.



13. BRIAR CREST, William Henry Maule residence, Villanova, PA., 1901. Demolished.



14. RATHALLA, Joseph Sinnott residence, Rosemont, Pa.



15. WOODMONT, Alan Wood Jr. residence, Gladwyne, Pa.



16. 1908 ATLAS VIEW OF PENSHURST, Penn Valley, Pa. Demolished.



17. PENCLOYD, John Roberts residence, Bala Cynwyd, Pa., 1878. Demolished.



18. PENCLOYD, 1915, after alterations by Frank Furness.



19. CLAIREMONT FARM, Villanova, Pa., now Northeastern Christian Junior College.



20. BALLYTORE, Isaac Clothier residence, Wynnewood, Pa., 1886.



21. BALLYTORE, now the Armenian Church of St. Sahag and St. Mesrob.



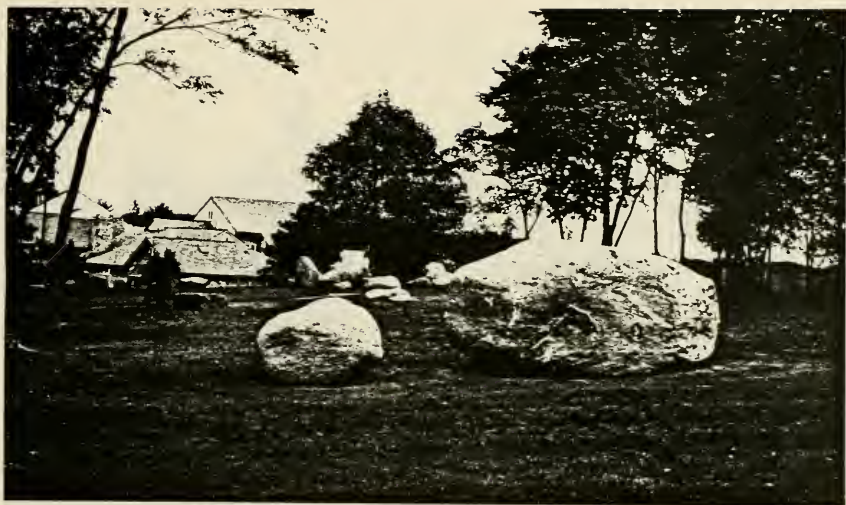
22. WILLIAM JOYCE RESIDENCE, Rosemont, Pa., now Convent of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus.



23. SUBDIVISION, Villanova, Pa., 1987.



24. 1946 ATLAS VIEW OF LA RONDA, Gladwyne, Pa.



25. THE HERMITAGE, Gladwyne, Pa. Boulders were substituted for the trees that were cut down.



26. FRAMAR, Frank Ryckel residence, Gladwyne, Pa.



27. WRENFIELD, Gladwyne, Pa. Ryckel estate is in background.



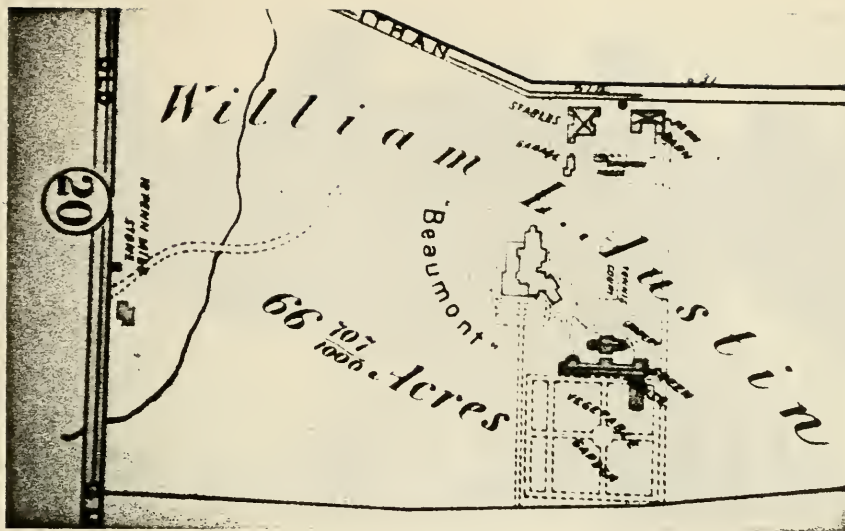
28. WRENFIELD. New attached dwellings.



29. WAVERLY HEIGHTS, Gladwyne, Pa. Original mansion on right; new units on left.



30. WAVERLY HEIGHTS. New life-care facilities.



31. 1946 ATLAS VIEW OF BEAUMONT, William Austin estate, Bryn Mawr, Pa.



32. BEAUMONT. Model showing Austin mansion in the center of new complex.



33. BEAUMONT. Life-care facilities under construction in October, 1986.



34. AERIAL VIEW OF BEAUMONT BEFORE DEVELOPMENT. Grounds were once densely wooded.



35. HARRITON, Anna Shinn Maier estate, Bryn Mawr, Pa.

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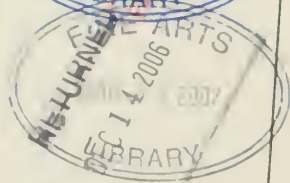
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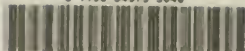
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