

Clare Lise Kelly  
Senior Historic Preservation Officer  
Historic Preservation Office  
Montgomery County Planning Board  
8787 Georgia Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

March 20, 2008

Re: Wild Acres Nomination for Master Plan for Historic Preservation

Dear Ms. Kelly:

I would like to nominate Wild Acres, Inventory No. M 30-15, located at 5440 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814, for designation on the Master Plan for Historic Preservation. The manor house, appurtenances and environmental setting meet the historical and cultural significance criteria (a) and (c) and the architectural and design criteria (a) and (b) of Chapter 24A of the Montgomery County Code. The Wild Acres estate is a prime example of a 1920s Tudor Revival country estate and embodies the elegance and style of the period. It was also for 40 years the home of Gilbert H. Grosvenor, the Editor of the *National Geographic Magazine* and President of the National Geographic Society. The house was the scene of numerous social gatherings of famous people, including Grosvenor's father-in-law, Alexander Graham Bell. The house also represents the work of a well-known architect of the time, Arthur B. Heaton, whose work has gained in appreciation in recent years.

Attached please find the Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form. Current and historic photographs of the house, carriage house, groundskeeper's cottage and the setting, as well as architectural drawings, will be supplied separately.

Sincerely,

O. Julia Weller

# Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. M 30-15

## 1. Name of Property

historic Wild Acres  
other Grosvenor Estate

## 2. Location

street and number 5400 Grosvenor Lane \_ not for publication  
city, town Bethesda \_ vicinity  
county Montgomery County

## 3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Society of American Foresters  
street and number 5400 Grosvenor Lane telephone 301.897.8720  
city, town Bethesda state MD zip code 20814

## 4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montgomery County Courthouse liber 4478 folio 335  
city, town Rockville, MD tax map HP12 tax parcel PO 65 tax ID number 07-00424030

## 5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- Contributing Resource in National Register District  
 Contributing Resource in Local Historic District  
 Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register  
 Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register  
 Recorded by HABS/HAER  
 Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT  
 Other: Montgomery County Historic Preservation Office

## 6. Classification

Category	Ownership	Current Function		Resource Count	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce/trade	<input type="checkbox"/> recreation/culture	<u>3</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> defense	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site		<input type="checkbox"/> domestic	<input type="checkbox"/> social	<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
		<input type="checkbox"/> funerary	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<u>6</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> Total
		<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> unknown		
		<input type="checkbox"/> health care	<input type="checkbox"/> vacant/not in use		
		<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> other:		

**Number of Contributing Resources  
previously listed in the Inventory**

**Condition**

excellent       deteriorated  
 good             ruins  
 fair               altered

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Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

**Description of Wild Acres Estate**

Wild Acres is a suburban estate located at 5400 Grosvenor Lane, on the west side of Rockville Pike in North Bethesda. Built in 1928-1929, the estate consists of a large Tudor-style manor house, a carriage house, a two-story groundskeeper's cottage, an outbuilding and adjacent silo, and 26.43 acres of land.<sup>1</sup> The primary façade faces north and the house is approached from the street via the original driveway, which passes through a thick screen of trees and past the groundskeeper's cottage before circling in front of the house. Surrounding the driveway at the front of the house are a variety of tree species, including a stand of Southern Magnolia and pine trees towering almost 50 feet tall, which hide the house from the street. Behind the house is a rolling lawn that slopes down to an overgrown pond and is shaded by a number of majestic trees.<sup>2</sup> The property beyond the southern lawn is heavily wooded. Until recently, a colonial hewn-stone boundary marker stood on the property.<sup>3</sup> The three-foot high stone, carved with the initials of an early owner of the property, Andrew S. Heugh, is believed to have been moved.<sup>4</sup>

The imposing manor house is an outstanding example of the Tudor Revival period from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and is built in two intentionally asymmetrical sections and two distinct styles. The larger west section is constructed of uncoursed rubble stone, cut from the nearby River Road quarry and selected for its pinkish tone by Gilbert Grosvenor's wife, Elsie May Bell, the daughter of Alexander Graham Bell<sup>5</sup>. The smaller east section is made of brick at the lower story while the construction of upper story is made to look like Tudor-period English country homes with wattle and daub designs and *faux* half timber applied to clay block walls. A large porch at the end of the west wing wraps around from northern elevation to the southern elevation. At the east end of the house, a covered outside staircase with a front door at ground level of the northern façade provides the entrance to an enclosed porch on the second floor, which wraps around from the northern elevation to the southern elevation. The hipped roof of the east section and the gable roof of the west section are both tiled with slate imported from England. The house has four imposing brick chimneys and ornate copper gutters and downspouts.

Wild Acres is situated in the Wildwood Manor neighborhood of Bethesda, a middle-class post-World War II subdivision divided into modest lots with mature trees. However, the immediate setting surrounding the mansion—the driveway, the woods at the front of the property long Grosvenor Lane, the lawns in front and behind the house, and woods beyond the southern lawn—still evoke the country mansion era of the 1920s.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Another 8.31 acres of the Wild Acres property is owned by the RNR Title Holding Corporation but that property is not addressed herein.

<sup>2</sup> Carol J., *Wild Acres: A Self-Guided Tour*, Society of American Foresters Booklet (undated), p. 4

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Conversation with Edwin S. Grosvenor, who grew up (and still lives) in the house next door, at 5510 Grosvenor Lane. Edwin Grosvenor is the grandson of the original owner of Wild Acres, Gilbert H. Grosvenor.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>6</sup> The two modern glass office buildings of the Renewable Natural Resources Foundation were built far enough away from the manor house that they do not spoil the views from the south-facing windows and porch and cannot be seen at all from the northern windows.

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### **Northern Façade of Manor House**

The front door on the northern façade is set in an arch and consists of two glass doors backed by decorative wrought iron designs. The Grosvenor family's coat of arms, featuring three hunting dogs around a shield and a sheaf of wheat, are carved in grey stone above the arch. Above the coat of arms is a prominent two-story bay window composed of four by eight light casement windows, surmounted by four light transom windows. At the peak of the bay window is a modern skylight. To the west of the main entrance door, at the second story, there are six over six light double hung windows arranged asymmetrically as singles, pairs and triples. Two copper downspouts run down either side of the middle window, before joining together like a bow under the sill and continuing its downward trajectory as a single pipe. The second floor of the east section has two dormer windows and six by six light casement windows with pent roofs.

The gable roof of the west section of the house covers a porch that extends from the front to the back of the house. The porch is supported by stone posts at the corners and by chamfered wood posts at the center of each of the three open sides of the porch. The floor is laid with flagstones.

### **Southern Façade of Manor House**

The southern façade of the house has a more symmetrical appearance than the northern façade and presents, if anything, an even more imposing impression than the main northern façade. Here the center section of the house projects beyond both the east and west wings, making it more prominent than the two wings. In the middle of the projecting center section is a three-part diamond-paned door flanked on either side by two extremely large bay windows. A delicately fluted semi-circular metal roof projects from the wall above the diamond-paned glass doors, protecting them from the elements. The second story has paired eight by eight light casement windows and there are five dormer windows at the third story.

On the first and second floor of the east wing, there are large picture windows and the exterior wall of the east wing is decorated with applied balusters. Two dormer windows project from the second story. A double French door provides access to the lawn on the ground floor.

The roof of the porch which sweeps around the west wing to the back of the house supports a small balcony under the window on the second story of the west wing.

### **Carriage House**

The carriage house, which is set at a short distance from the east end of the manor house and aligned on the same east-to-west axis, was cleverly designed to look like an extension of the truncated shorter east wing of main house. It has the same hipped roof covered in grey slate tiles, the brick walls on the lower half, and the

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wattle and daub and fake half timbers on the upper level of the northern façade of the smaller east wing. The dormer windows of the apartment on the upper story mirror those on the mansion. When viewed from the driveway approaching the northern façade of the house, the carriage house provides a visual continuum of the east wing of the manor house, with the result that what appears asymmetrical at close quarters, achieves a harmonious symmetry from a distance. The carriage house was clearly designed by the architect as an integral component of the manor house.

The carriage house--actually a four-door garage--has four double-doors designed to look like stable doors on the northern façade and a single rear door on the southern elevation. The roof is topped by small bell tower.

### **Caretaker's Cottage and Outbuildings**

The caretaker's cottage, at 5420 Grosvenor Lane, is a wood-frame structure with a brick foundation, wood shingle siding, and a cross-gable roof covered with asphalt shingles. It has a cut-away porch at the southwest corner of the front elevation, a central brick chimney, exposed rafter ends and an enclosed rear porch. It has wood 6/6 double hung windows and wood shutters. The cottage appears on a property survey done in 1915 for Gilbert Grosvenor<sup>7</sup> and it therefore pre-dates the manor house. The cottage is in good condition and has been continuously inhabited since it was built. A concrete silo with a broken metal dome sits in at the edge of the woods to the southeast of the carriage house, next to a wooden structure which stands on the site of a 1920s clapboard barn. The silo bears a 1943 date.

### **Interior of Manor House**

Wild Acres originally contained 14 bedrooms, eight bathrooms and three libraries. Two libraries--a large general library and one stocked with Gilbert Grosvenor's own books--were on the second floor, and another, which was Gilbert Grosvenor's private den, was on the first floor.<sup>8</sup> One library was furnished with intricately carved teak bookcases, mantels and paneling which came from Alexander Graham Bell's house at 1331 Connecticut Avenue, in Washington, D.C., which was torn down in 1927.<sup>9</sup> There were 29 doors of solid Central American mahogany from Gilbert Grosvenor's ancestral home in Worcester County, Massachusetts.<sup>10</sup> The house contained nine fireplaces, including one intricately carved marble fireplace and another antique marble mantle.<sup>11</sup> In the nursery, on the third floor, was a fireplace faced with ceramic tiles depicting animals from nursery rhymes. A frieze and corner plaques of barn owls in the four corners were painted by the wildlife

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<sup>7</sup> The blue print of the property survey is owned by Edwin Grosvenor, Gilbert Grosvenor's grandson, and was shown to the author.

<sup>8</sup> Farquhar, Jr., Roger Brooke, *Historic Montgomery County, Maryland: Old Homes and History*, 1962 edition, p. 322

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Carol J., *Wild Acres: A Self-Guided Tour*, Society of American Foresters Booklet (undated), p. 4.

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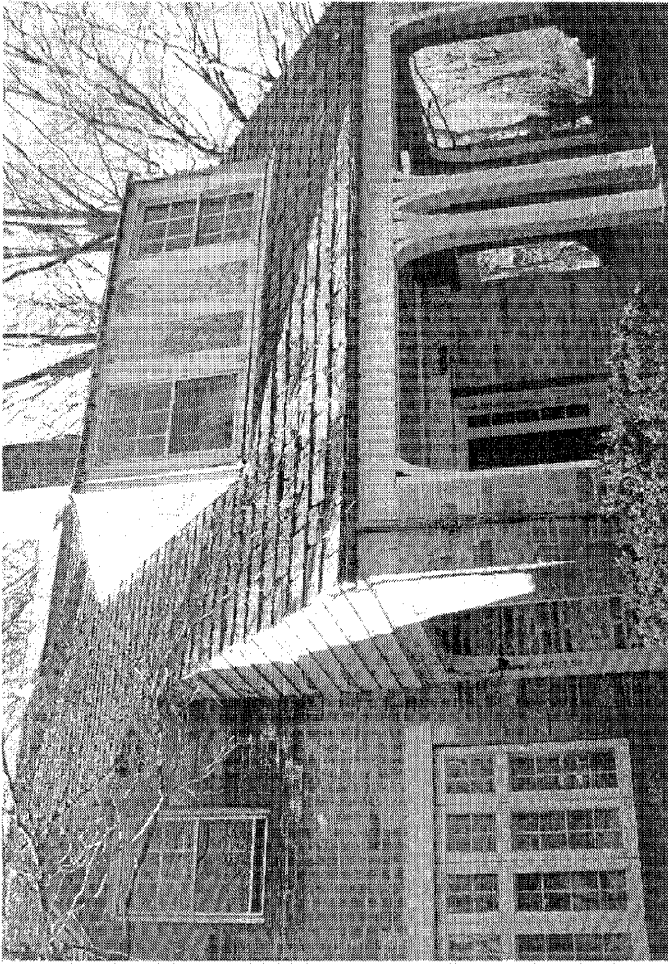
artist Hashime Murayama<sup>12</sup>, whose elegant and soft-toned paintings of exotic Silkie fowl, prized Japanese *koi* and woodland wildlife were featured frequently in the *National Geographic Magazine* during Gilbert Grosvenor's tenure as Editor-in-Chief. All the rooms were laid with oak floors.

The interior of the manor house was remodeled in 1975 for use as offices and conference rooms. The fireplaces, including the antique marble mantle in are still intact but the walls of every room have been covered with vertical wood paneling, which obscure the frieze and paintings in the sitting room. The teak bookcases in one of the libraries were removed by the Society of American Foresters when they remodeled the house but are still in existence.<sup>13</sup> The sitting room was divided to make a conference room and office for the President of the SAF and the dining room and master suite on the second floor were partitioned to make offices. The third floor, originally the Grosvenors' nursery, still contains the ceramic-tiled fireplace. The oak floors have been refinished but are original, as are most of the doors. The changes to the interior are largely reversible by simply removing the wood paneling from the ceilings and walls and removing the subdividing walls. A canvas awning over the main entrance door is a temporary fixture. The woodwork on the exterior needs painting but in major respects the house is in good condition. The integrity of the mansion and the carriage house have not been compromised because there have been no changes to any exterior walls, windows or exterior doors. Temporary fixtures like the canvas awning over the main door can be easily removed. The Tudor Revival designs of the manor house and the carriage house, the approach from the road, the caretaker's cottage, the lawns in front and behind the house, the outbuildings and the view of the woods beyond, all the remain exactly as they were when Wild Acres was built in 1928-1929.

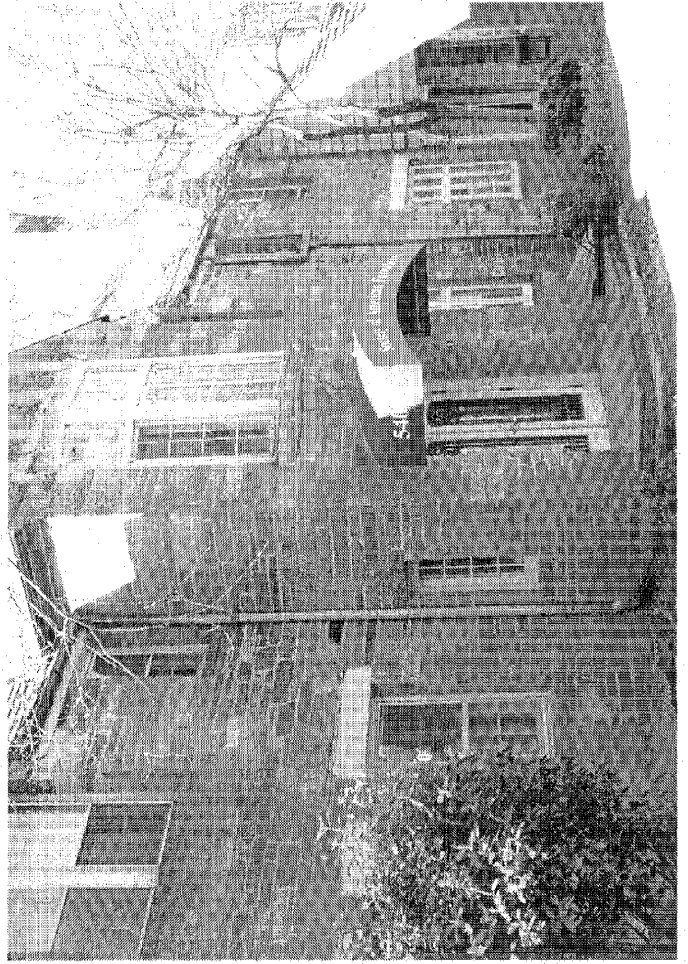
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<sup>12</sup> Marsha, and Gauzza, Roy , Sugarloaf Regional Trails, Maryland Historical Trust NR-Eligibility Review Form Fall 1978

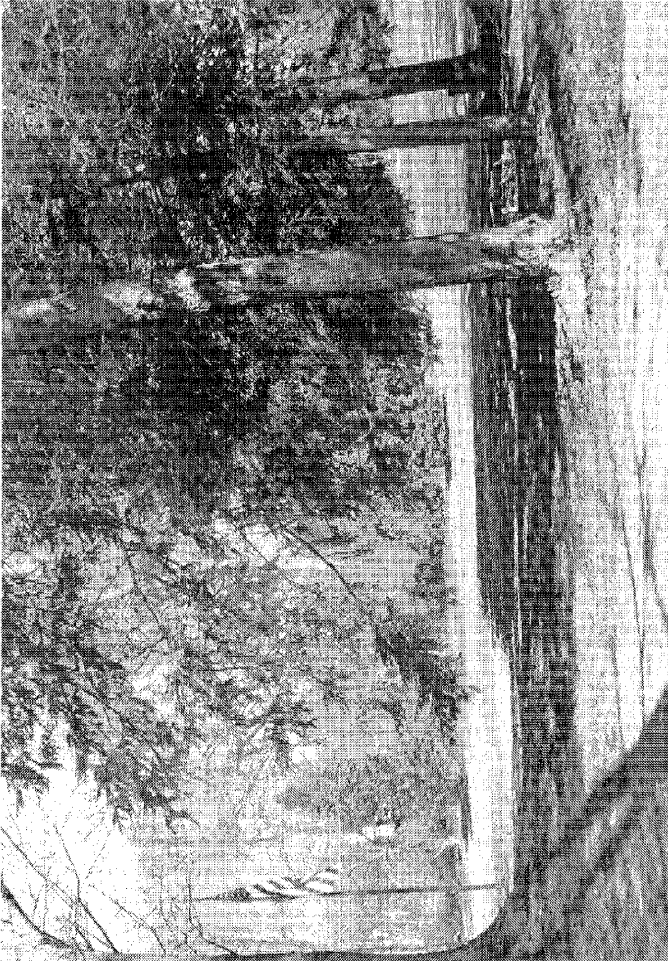
<sup>13</sup> They are now in the home of Anne R. Grosvenor, the widow of Melville Bell Grosvenor, in the neighboring house at 5510 Grosvenor Lane.



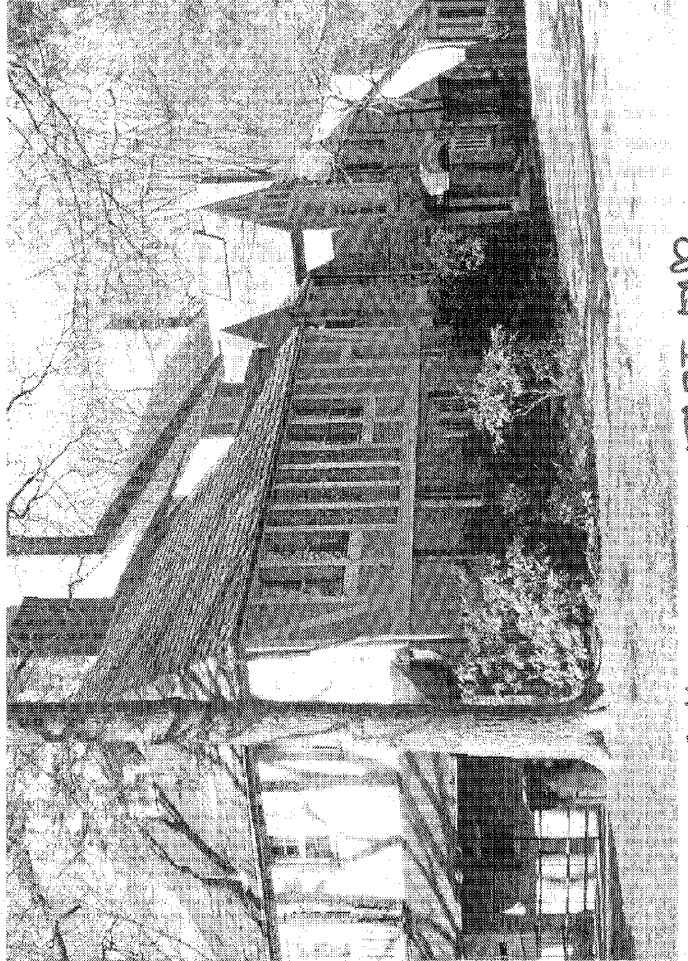
NORTH SIDE WEST END



NORTH DOOR

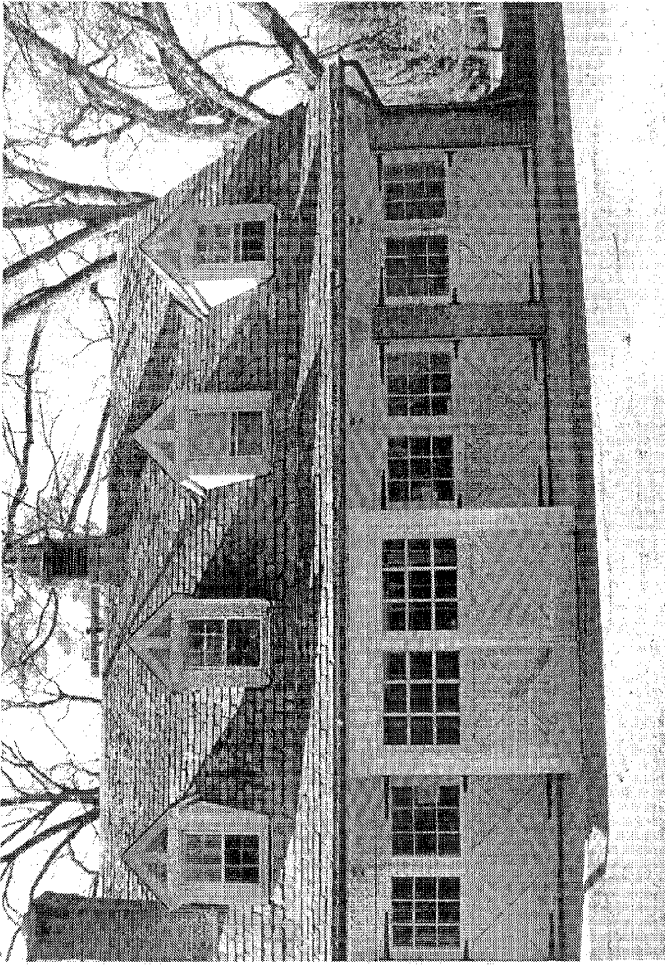


VIEW NORTH

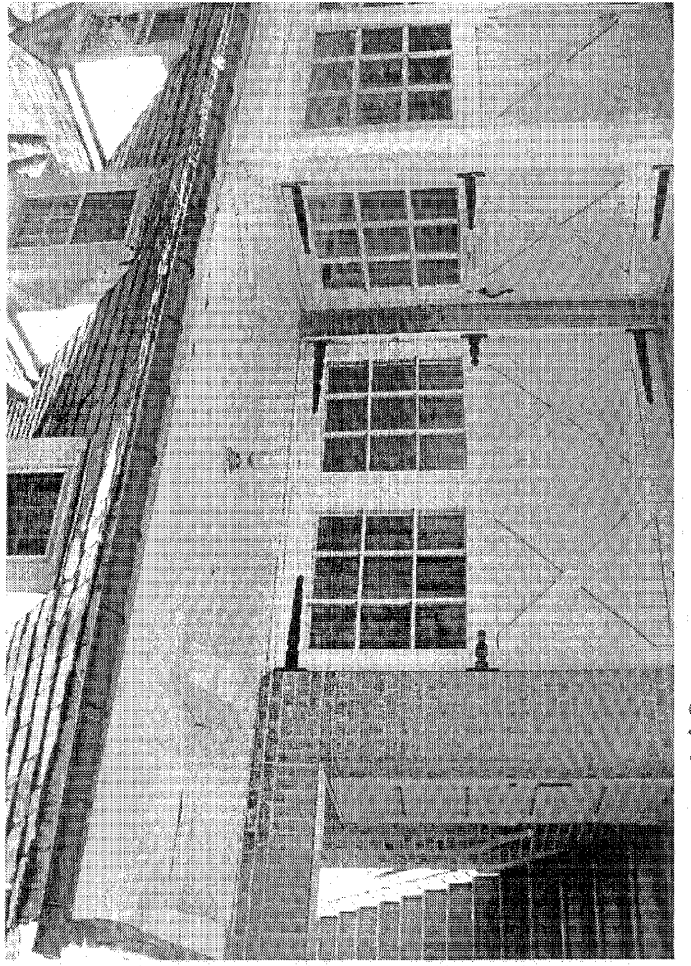


NORTH FACADE EAST END

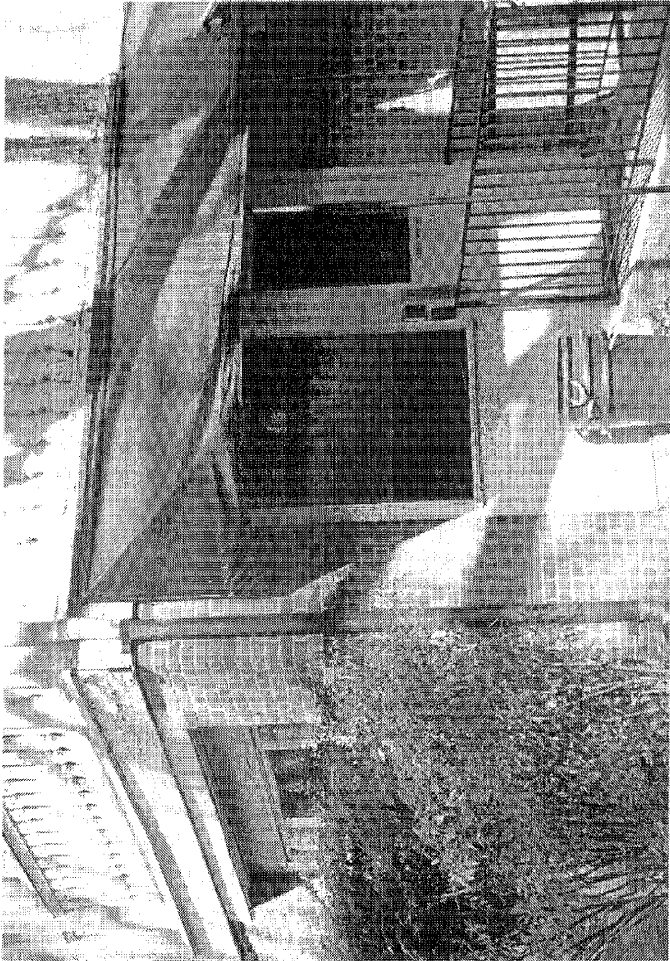




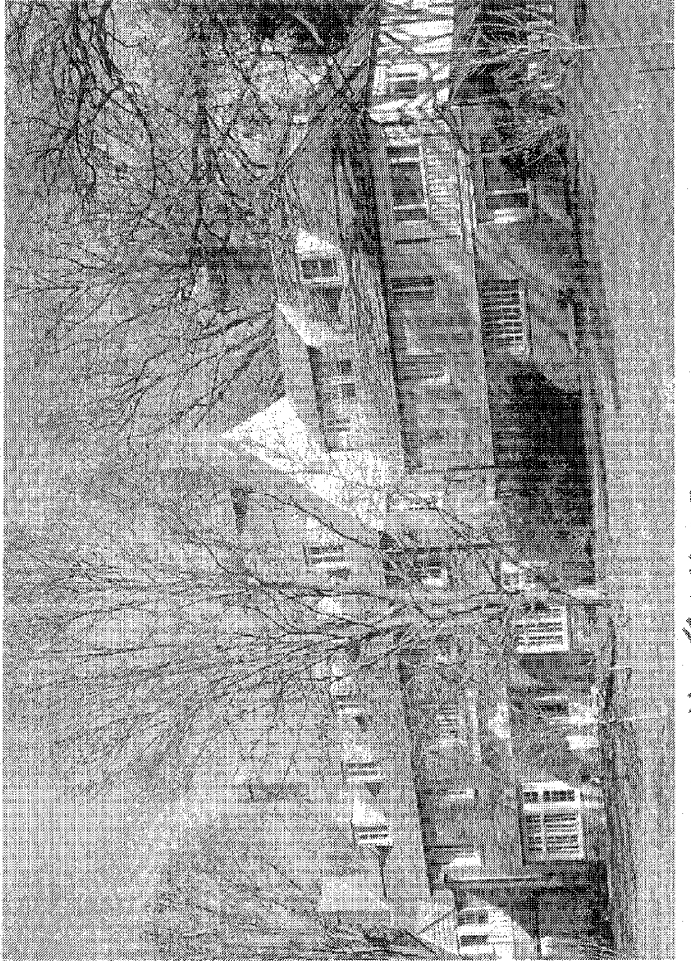
GARAGE



GARAGE



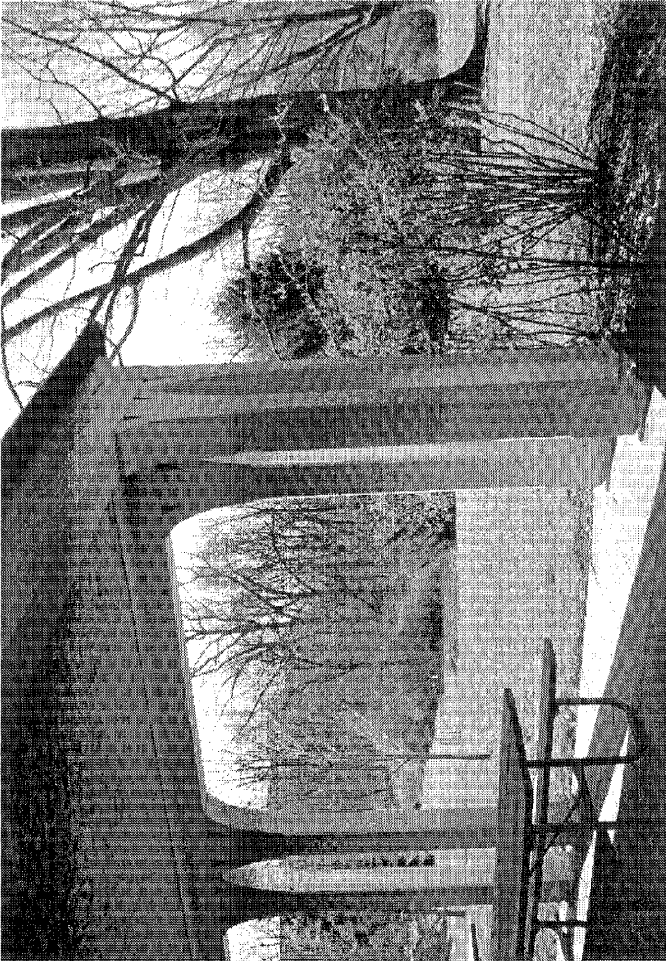
SE CORNER



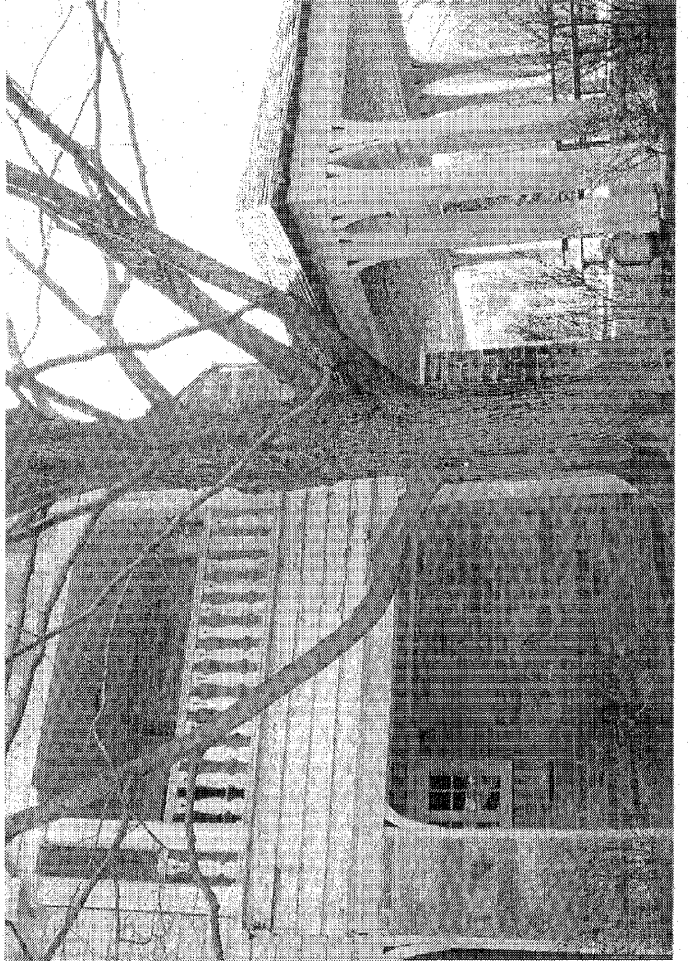
SOUTH FACADE



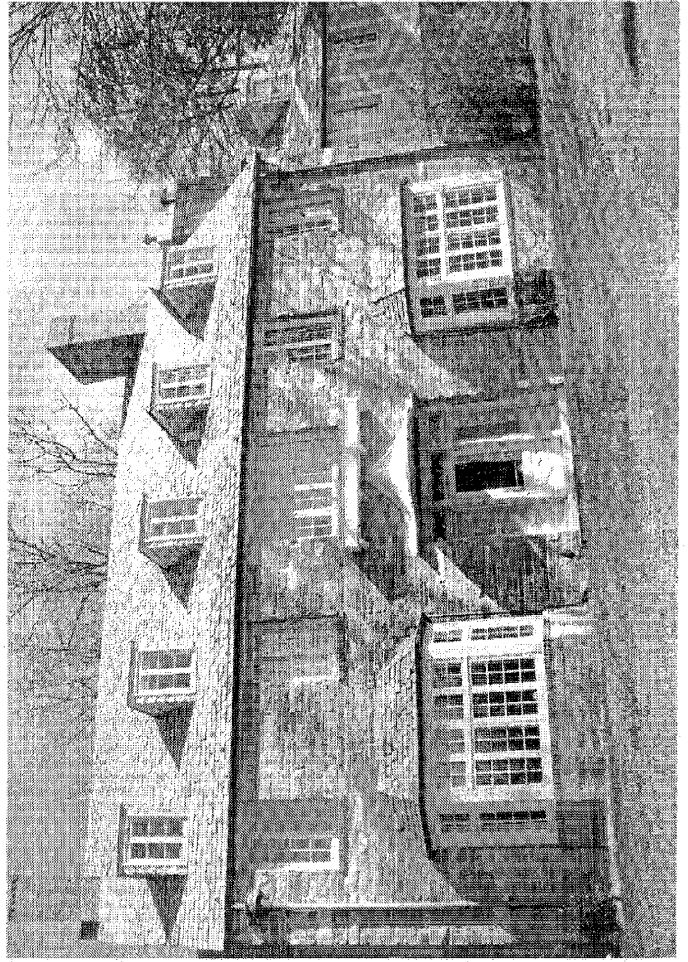
VIEW SOUTH



WEST END



SOUTH FACADE, CENTRAL BLOCK



## 8. Significance

Inventory No. M 30-15

Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

Specific dates

Architect/Builder Arthur B. Heaton

Construction dates 1928-1929

Evaluation for:

National Register

Maryland Register

not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

### Statement of Significance

Wild Acres, constructed in 1928-1929, represents a period in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when wealthy Washingtonians purchased large tracts of farmland in the farmland of Montgomery County, Maryland and created country estates to which they retreated from the city during the summers and on the weekends. It is one of the few large Tudor Revival manor houses to have survived remarkably intact with its appurtenances and its original environmental setting. Wild Acres meets Criterion 24A-3(b)(1)(a) of Chapter 24 of the Montgomery County Ordinance as an unusual survivor from the pre-suburban period of Bethesda's history when it was a mixture of farmland and summer retreats.<sup>14</sup> It meets Criterion 24A-3(b)(1)(c) because it was the home of Gilbert H. Grosvenor, who, as Editor of the *National Geographic Magazine* and President of the National Geographic Society, had a tremendous influence on exploration of unknown parts of the natural world and preservation of America's national parks. Wild Acres also meets Criterion 24A-3(2)(a) because it is an excellent example of the Tudor Revival design typical of country estates built in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The main house and the carriage house meet Criterion 24A-3(2)(b) and (c) because they were designed by Arthur Berthrong Heaton, considered one of the leading architects of his day, and because they possess distinctive and highly artistic features.

Wild Acres is built on a former land-grant site, recorded by the Lord Proprietor of Maryland in the late 1600s as part of the "Leeke Forest" and "Dann." The property contained numerous colonial-era boundary markers, which can be seen on a survey performed in 1915 for Gilbert Grosvenor, and one remained on the property until fairly recently.<sup>15</sup> The three-foot high stone was carved with the initials of an early owner of the property, Andrew S. Heugh, a prominent Georgetown tobacco merchant.<sup>16</sup> Heugh's holdings were described on 1783 tax rolls as "200 acres of cleared land with good soil, a few acres in meadow, one good dwelling house, kitchen,

<sup>14</sup> Historic Preservation Office, Montgomery County Planning Department, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, *Moreland File*

<sup>15</sup> The survey is the private property of Edwin Grosvenor and a copy will be provided to the Planning Commission

<sup>16</sup> McKernon, Carol J., *Wild Acres: A Self-Guided Tour*, Society of American Foresters Booklet (undated), p. 1

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barn, and quarters, etc.”<sup>17</sup> During the Civil War, a farmer named John Wilson lived on the property. One of the country’s oldest toll roads, now Rockville Pike, ran to the east of the property. It was heavily used by Union troops and supply trains and Confederate rebel Jeb Stuart led a raid on a Yankee wagon train just as it passed the farm.<sup>18</sup> In 1890, a trolley car line was laid alongside the western boundary of the property. Three parcels of land which totaled the original 105 acres of the Wild Acres estate were consolidated in 1910 by Leigh and Jessie Hunt and a farmhouse was built on the property.<sup>19</sup> After a brief ownership by Julian Hite Miller,<sup>20</sup> the property was purchased in 1912 by Gilbert H. Grosvenor and his wife, Elsie May Bell, the daughter of Alexander Graham Bell.<sup>21</sup>

### Country Estates

Montgomery County had long been a summer retreat for the elite of Washington D.C. when the Grosvenors bought the farm they named Wild Acre. Hotels had catered to rich citizens who had wanted to escape the oppressive heat and humidity of the city during the summer months. But it was roads and the accessibility that they offered that led to the purchase of farms for weekend and summer homes. Country estates had been carved out of farmland starting in the early 1900s<sup>22</sup> and a number of country estates designed by some of the country’s most noted architects had appeared along Rockville Pike.<sup>23</sup> One of the earliest Classical Revival mansions was the Charles Corby Estate, built in 1914. Now known as Strathmore Hall, the Corby estate was only a short distance away from the Wild Acres farm on Rockville Pike. In 1917, *Washington Post* publisher John F. Wilkins commissioned a stately summer home near Rockville from noted architect John Russell Pope.<sup>24</sup> Woodend, another Classical Revival mansion, was designed by Pope for Chester Wells, a naval officer, and Marian Dixon Wells, an Australian heiress, and constructed in North Chevy Chase in 1927-1928.<sup>25</sup> The Grosvenors’ decision to replace the farmhouse they had outgrown around the same time was thus no coincidence. The construction of suburban Classical and Tudor Revival mansions in Montgomery County was at its height and a couple as renowned as Gilbert and Elsie Grosvenor would undoubtedly have felt the need to follow suit.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Land Records of Montgomery County, MD. 218/473, 475, and 476.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 230/237

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 230/260.

<sup>22</sup> A full description of the suburban development of Montgomery County at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be found in Historic Preservation Office, Montgomery County Planning Department, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, *Moreland File*.

<sup>23</sup> Cavicchi, Clare Lise, *Places from the Past: The Tradition of Gardez Bien*, M-NCPPC, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

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### Gilbert H. Grosvenor

Gilbert Grosvenor was born in Constantinople, in what was then the Ottoman Empire, in 1875 and educated at Amherst College with his twin brother. "Bert," as he was known, joined the *National Geographic Magazine* as Assistant Editor in 1899 on the recommendation of his future father-in-law, Alexander Graham Bell, who was then President of the National Geographic Society. He married Elsie May Bell in London in 1900 and in 1903 became Editor-in-Chief of the magazine. Under his stewardship, he transformed the publication from a stuffy scholarly journal with a circulation of 1,000 into an award-winning magazine known for its dazzling photographs of far corners of the globe that, by the time he retired in 1954, had a circulation of 2,150,000. Today, the *National Geographic* has a circulation of 9 million copies published in 32 languages. The soaring revenues from the magazine were used to sponsor numerous expeditions and scientific studies. Among them were Robert Peary's 1909 expedition to the North Pole, Lt. Cmdr. Richard E. Byrd's flight to the North Pole and back, William Beebe's record-setting deep sea descent in the Atlantic ocean in 1935, and discovery in Alaska and the Yukon of the largest ice fields and glacier systems outside of the polar region. He introduced the magazine's extraordinary photographic services and map department and pioneered issues that featured primarily photographs with minimal text.

Gilbert Grosvenor was also a strong supporter of Stephen Mather and his efforts to expand and improve the national park system. He ran numerous features on national parks and dedicated the April 1916 issue of the *National Geographic* to the national parks to promote the value of park resources. Photographs that appeared in the April 1916 issue were used during Congressional hearings to establish a national park service. Following a trip with Mather to Sequoia National Park and the High Sierras in 1915, Grosvenor provided \$20,000 of the National Geographic Society's funds to supplement the \$50,000 congressional appropriation to buy Giant Forest and add it to Sequoia National Park. Expeditions sponsored by his magazine and the data it generated twice led to the establishment of a national monument: Katmai in 1918 and Carlsbad Caverns in 1923. Gilbert Grosvenor's interest in the national parks and the articles he sponsored helped educate millions of Americans about the natural beauty of their country.

Gilbert Grosvenor and his wife purchased the Wild Acres property in 1912. For 16 years they used the existing farmhouse on the property as a summer home. But the house had no electricity, running water or heating, and when their family outgrew the farmhouse, they decided to build a new home. They selected as their architect Arthur B. Heaton, a well known Washington, D.C. architect, who had designed many Tudor Revival homes in the city

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### Arthur Berthrong Heaton<sup>26</sup>

Arthur B. Heaton was born in Washington, D.C. in 1875. He served a brief apprenticeship with the D.C. firm of Smithmeyer and Petz, before opening his own architectural office in 1900. In 1903, he went to Europe for a year to study at the Sorbonne and tour the great cathedrals of Europe. He served as supervising architect during the first 14 years of construction of the Washington Cathedral and designed the Cathedral Apse, All Hallows Gate and the Little Sanctuary. During the Depression, Heaton was a leader in the "Renovize Washington" movement to repair the city's houses and at the same time provide work for members of the building industry. He designed two buildings for the George Washington University Campus; the dormitory, gym and library at the National Cathedral School for girls; the Bishops House at St. Albans; and an addition for the John Eaton School in Georgetown. He had a particular interest in cars and was one of the first to own a motor vehicle in Washington. His interest in cars led him to design a number of parking garages and gas stations. Arthur Heaton made many visit to Williamsburg and to the home of Thomas Jefferson, whom he admired greatly. He took his inspiration from English, Italian and American Colonial architecture. These influences can be seen in the National Geographic building on 16<sup>th</sup> St. and the many homes he designed in Cleveland Park, and his four large apartment buildings—the Highlands, Montgomery, Marlborough and Augusta.

### Wild Acres

Wild Acres reflects not one, but two styles of the Tudor revival homes built during the period 1890 to 1940. Based loosely on English vernacular buildings, the earlier style of country estate popular among prominent members of Washington society featured decorative half-timbering with stucco in-fill. By the 1920s, brick Tudor-style homes were more common. Arthur Heaton's design for Wild Acres combined both styles in a uniquely asymmetrical juxtaposition. The detailing and the quality of the materials used were typical of Arthur Heaton's buildings and reflected his life-long advocacy of quality craftsmanship.

Wild Acres was the Grosvenors' home for almost 40 years, during which time it was the scene of numerous lively social functions attended by many world-famous personalities and reported in the Washington, D.C. press. Mrs. Grosvenor's parents, Mabel and Alexander Graham Bell, were frequent visitors to the house. Other well-known guests included Charles Lindbergh, Marie Curie, President Taft, Cabinet Ministers, Stephen Mather, among others. A photograph published in Roger Brooke Farquhar, Jr.'s *Historic Montgomery County: Old Homes and History*, shows Dr. And Mrs. Gilbert Grosvenor hosting a birthday party at Wild Acres for Mrs. William Howard Taft in June of 1929. William Howard Taft was then the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and had been President of the United States from 1909-1913. Included in the assembly are Associate Justices of the Supreme Court, Congressmen, Senators, a leader of the U.S. North Pole expedition of 1881-1884, Dr.

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<sup>26</sup> Historic Preservation Office, Montgomery County Planning Department, Research Files, *Arthur B. Heaton*



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Hugh Cummings, Surgeon General of the Public Health Service and the man responsible for the National Institute of Health's precursor, the National Public Health Service, in Bethesda, as well as their wives and neighbors. In 1950 the Grosvenors celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary at Wild Acres with over 400 guests in attendance.

Gilbert Grosvenor's son, Melville Bell Grosvenor (who became Editor upon his father's retirement and expanded the *National Geographic Magazine's* photography department and international reach), lived in the apartment above the carriage house with his second wife Anne, when they were first married.<sup>27</sup> In 1952, they moved into a house built for them on the corner of Grosvenor Lane and Fleming Ave., next door to Wild Acres and the families continued to congregate at Wild Acres. The property continued to be farmed until after WWII and had orchards, vegetable gardens, chickens and horses and fields until the 1960s.<sup>28</sup>

Elsie Grosvenor died in 1964 and Gilbert Grosvenor died in 1966. After his death, Wild Acres was rented to the President of a proposed National Graduate University, Dr. Walter E. Bock. But when the university failed to materialize, the Grosvenor family offered the estate to Montgomery County in 1970 for use as a cultural or recreation center. The County declined the offer and in 1973, the house, carriage house, caretakers cottage, the silo, out building and a large part of the remaining woods (26.43 acres) were sold to the Society of American Foresters (SAF), while a small parcel of land (8.27 acres) was sold to the Renewable Natural Resources Foundation (RNRF).

The size of the estate was significantly reduced when Interstate 95 and 495 were widened and large tracts of the property were taken for construction of the highway. However, the remaining 34.7 acres (26.43 owned by the SAF and 8.27 acres owned by the RNRF) still represent one of the largest remaining country estates created during the two World Wars by wealthy Washingtonians in Montgomery County. In size it is comparable to the Woodend estate now owned by the Audubon Society in Chevy Chase, MD. Few estates of this size have been preserved in the county.

### Conclusion

Wild Acres meets the criterion of Section 24A-3 (b)(1)(a) of the Montgomery County Code (Historic Resources Preservation) for its role in the history of the development of suburban country estates. The house, its appurtenances and environmental setting is one of the few remaining large Montgomery County estates of the 1920s. Constructed for a nationally renowned figure who promoted the virtues of nature, this estate embodies the ideal of a country retreat. Wild Acres meets the criterion of Section 24A-3 (b)(1)(c) because it was the home for 40 years of Gilbert Grosvenor, who single-handedly made the *National Geographic Magazine* into a

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<sup>27</sup> Conversation with Anne Grosvenor.

<sup>28</sup> Conversation with Edwin Grosvenor.

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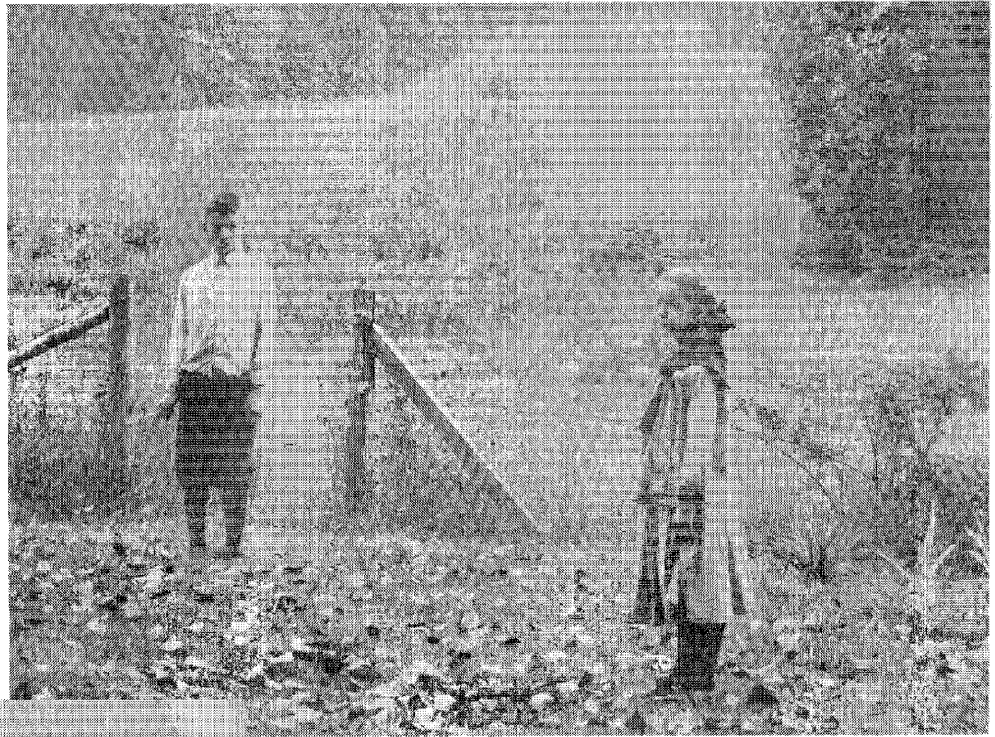
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household word and captivated the nation with his photographs and records of strange and wonderful places. It is also strongly associated with Grosvenor's father-in-law, the inventor Alexander Graham Bell, who was a frequent visitor to the estate. The house and carriage house also meet the criterion of Section 24A-3 (b)(2)(a) because they are prime examples of the Tudor Revival style of architecture. The exteriors have been preserved in their original state and the interiors can be restored to their original state without great difficulty. The house embodies the transition from one Tudor Revival style to another and retains many of the ornamental details of the period. Finally, Wild Acres meets the criterion of Section 24A-3 (b)(1)(b). Although Arthur B. Heaton is not as well known as John Russell Pope, his legacy of homes has become more appreciated in recent years and Wild Acres is the only known extant example of a country estate designed by him. The property therefore also qualifies for historic preservation under Section 24A-3 (b)(2)(b).

The farm had open fields until the 1960s. (The I-495 Beltway cut through the south fields in the distance.) During World War II it was an active cattle farm to help the war effort.



The present house was built in 1929 and frequently hosted parties. This one included Chief Justice William Howard Taft (center left next to Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Grosvenor) and Arctic explorer A.W. Greely (light colored suit on the right.)



“Wild Acres,” the Grosvenor farm in Bethesda

Grandparents Mabel and Alexander Graham Bell visit the farm around 1920.



Mabel Grosvenor on her horse around 1918, with the original farm house in the back.



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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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See Attached Continuation Sheet for Bibliography

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of surveyed property 34.7  
Acreage of historical setting 105  
Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle scale: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

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## 11. Form Prepared by

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name/title	Julia Weller		
organization	Hunton & Williams LLP	date	3/18/2008
street & number	1900 K St., N.W.	telephone	202.955.1500
city or town	Washington	state	D.C.

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
Maryland Department of Planning  
100 Community Place  
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023  
410-514-7600



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