

1. Name: Wild Acres (Grosvenor Estate) no
2. Planning Area/Site Number: 30/15      3. M-NCPPC Atlas Reference: Map 21  
B-4
4. Address: 5400 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda

## 5. Classification Summary

Category building      Previous Survey Recording M-NCPPC  
 Ownership private      Title and Date: Inventory of Historical  
 Public Acquisition NA      Sites - 1976  
 Status occupied  
 Accessible yes: restricted      Federal      State X County X Local       
 Present use educational/scientific

6. Date: 1928      7. Original Owner: Gilbert Grosvenor

## 8. Apparent Condition

a. excellent      b. altered      c. original site

9. Description: This large Tudor-influenced estate house was built in 1928 for Gilbert Grosvenor. Built in two distinctive sections, the west section is constructed of uncoursed rubblestone quarried from the nearby River Road Quarry. The east section is constructed of brick and the second level has wattle and daub designs applied to clay block walls. There are six-over-six double-hung windows arranged as singles, pairs, and triples. There is a second level bay window on the south (front) door. The gable roof above the west section and the hipped roof above the east section are covered by slate tiles.

ARCHITECT:  
ARTHUR B.  
HEATON

10. Significance: Wild Acres was for almost 40 years the home of Dr. Gilbert Grosvenor, founder of the National Geographic Society, and his wife Elsie, daughter of Alexander Graham Bell.

The three parcels which total the original 105 acre estate were consolidated in 1910 by Leigh and Jessie Hunt; this land was improved by an old farmhouse. The Grosvenors bought the land in 1912, and spent summers in the old farmhouse, until they built the mansion in 1928. The mansion had 14 bedrooms, 8 baths, and 3 libraries. The house was the scene of frequent social functions, attended by many world-famous personalities.

After Dr. Grosvenor's death in 1966, Wild Acres was offered to Montgomery County for use as a cultural or community center. The offer was refused, and in 1973, 47 acres and the house were sold to the Renewable Natural Resources Foundation, a combination of 11 earth science professional organizations. The interior was remodeled in 1975 by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

11. Researcher and date researched: Marsha Mai - Fall 1978      Candy Reed  
Roy Gauzza

12. Compiler: Gail C. Rothrock      13. Date Compiled: 2/79      14. Designation  
Approval
15. Acreage: 47 acres

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Wild Acres

AND/OR COMMON

Grosvenor Estate

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

5400 Grosvenor Lane

CITY, TOWN

Bethesda

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

8

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

Montgomery

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Renewable Natural Resources Foundation Telephone #: 897-8720

STREET & NUMBER

5400 Grosvenor Lane

CITY, TOWN

Bethesda

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

Maryland 20014

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Montgomery County Courthouse

Liber #: 4478

Folio #: 335

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Rockville

STATE

Maryland

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

MNCPPC Historical Sites Inventory

DATE

1976

\_\_\_ FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Park Historian's Office

CITY, TOWN

Derwood

STATE

Maryland 20855

# DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

This large Tudor-influenced estate house was built in 1928 for Gilbert Grosvenor and his family.

There are two visually distinctive parts to this estate. Built on stone foundations the west section is constructed of uncoursed rubblestone quarried from the nearby River Road quarry. The east section is constructed of brick, and at the second story, imitation wattle and daub is applied to clay block walls.

On the south elevation, west section, there is a three part door. The center piece is a door of diamond panes and wooden panels flanked by sidelights of diamond panels and surmounted by a diamond-paned transom. A conical metal hood shelters the doorway. On the south elevation, east section, there is a French door. On the north elevation, west section, there is a projecting pavilion. A pair of glass doors with wrought iron decoration built into the interior side of the door is set into a round arch. Above the arch is the carved stone Grosvenor family shield which supports a bay window. The window is composed of four eight light casement windows surmounted by four light transom windows. At the peak of the bay window is a modern skylight.

At the west end of the structure is a porch which wraps around from the northwest corner of the north elevation around the west elevation, and onto the southwest corner of the south elevation. The gable roof of the house extends out over the porch and is supported at the outer corners by stone posts and at the center by chamfered wooden posts. The porch has a flagstone floor.

There are two large bay windows flanking the main door on the south elevation. At the second story there are paired eight by eight light casement windows. At the third story there are five dormer windows with three by three light casement windows. On the south elevation, east section, there are large picture windows at the first and second stories. The exterior wall is decorated by applied balusters.

On the north elevation, east of the projecting pavilion, there are six over six light double hung windows arranged as singles, pairs, and triples. In the west section these windows have wooden lintels and brick sills. There are two dormer windows above the east section. There are six by six light casement windows with pent roofs. At the extreme west end of the west section there is a large triple dormer window composed of two six over six double hung windows flanking an equal sized blank wall which is bisected by a wooden post flush against the daubing.

There is a gable roof over the west section of the house. At the east section however, the roof is hipped. The roof is covered by slate tiles imported from England. There are four brick chimneys.

The interior of the house was extensively remodeled and renovated for the present owners by Baltimore Architect Rurick Ekstrom, in 1975. All the walls have been covered by various types of vertical wooden paneling; all ceilings are white pine. At the west end of the house the former living room has been partitioned to provide both a conference room and an office for the President of the Society of American Foresters. The bird frieze and corner plaques of barn owls mounted in the four corner of the living room were created by Hashime Murayama and now are covered by the wooden paneling. The marble fireplaces are all that remain of the days when the Grosvenor family lived here.

~~CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY~~

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		DATE _____

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On the south elevation, west section, there is a three part door. The center piece is a door of diamond panes and wooden panels flanked by sidelights of diamond panels and surmounted by a diamond-paned transom. A conical metal hood shelters the doorway. On the south elevation, east section, there is a French door. On the north elevation, west section, there is a projecting pavilion. A pair of glass doors with wrought iron decoration built into the interior side of the door is set into a round arch. Above the arch is the carved stone Grosvenor family shield which supports a bay window. The window is composed of four eight light casement windows surmounted by four light transom windows. At the peak of the bay window is a modern skylight.

At the west end of the structure is a porch which wraps around from the northwest corner of the north elevation around the west elevation, and onto the southwest corner of the south elevation. The gable roof of the house extends out over the porch and is supported at the outer corners by stone posts and at the center by chamfered wooden posts. The porch has a flagstone floor.

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On the north elevation, east of the projecting pavilion, there are six over six light double hung windows arranged as singles, pairs, and triples. In the west section these windows have wooden lintels and brick sills. There are two dormer windows above the east section. There are six by six light casement windows with pent roofs. At the extreme west end of the west section there is a large triple dormer window composed of two six over six double hung windows flanking an equal sized blank wall which is bisected by a wooden post flush against the daubing.

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The interior of the house was extensively remodeled and renovated for the present owners by Baltimore Architect Rurick Ekstrom, in 1975. All the walls have been covered by various types of vertical wooden paneling; all ceilings are white pine. At the west end of the house the former living room has been partitioned to provide both a conference room and an office for the President of the Society of American Foresters. The bird frieze and corner plaques of barn owls mounted in the four corners of the living room were created by Hashime Murayama and now are covered by ~~CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY~~ the wooden paneling. The marble fireplaces are all that remain of the days when the Grosvenor family lived here.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

Important  
Owners

SPECIFIC DATES 1928 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Arthur B. Heaton, Skinker & Garrett

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Wild Acres was for many years the home of Dr. Gilbert Grosvenor, founder of the National Geographic Magazine, and his wife Elsie, daughter of Alexander Graham Bell. It was the scene of frequent social functions, attended by many world-famous personalities.

The three parcels which total the 105 acres of Wild Acres were consolidated in 1910 by Leigh & Jessie Hunt; this land was improved by an old farmhouse.<sup>1</sup> After a brief ownership by Julian Hite Miller,<sup>2</sup> the Grosvenor bought the land in 1912<sup>3</sup> and spent summers in the old farmhouse for 16 years.

Construction of the mansion was begun in spring of 1928. It had 14 bedrooms, 8 baths, and 3 libraries. Woodwork and doors were brought from Alexander G. Bell's house in Washington, D.C., demolished in 1927, and from the maternal home of Gilbert Grosvenor in Massachusetts.

The Grosvenors entertained often at Wild Acres. Mrs. Grosvenor belonged to several local clubs and organizations. Dr. Grosvenor was the editor and president of the National Geographic Magazine from 1899 to 1954 when he retired. In 1929 the Grosvenors held a birthday party for Mrs. William Howard Taft, and in 1950 the Grosvenors celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at Wild Acres with 400 guests.

After Dr. Grosvenor's death in 1966 at his home in Nova Scotia, Wild Acres was rented to the National Graduate University as the residence of its President, Dr. Walter E. Bock. This University never materialized, and in 1970 the Grosvenor heirs offered the mansion to Montgomery County for use as a cultural or community center. This never materialized and 3 years later 47 acres and the house were sold to the Renewable Natural Resources Foundation, a combination of eleven earth science professional organizations. The Foundation engaged Skidmore, Owings and Merrill to remodel the interior of the house in 1975.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Land Records of Montgomery County, Md. 218/473,475, and 476.
- 2 Ibid, 230/237.
- 3 Ibid, 230/260.

(See Attachment Sheet A for Personal Significance of Gilbert H. Grosvenor)

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

rs  
y  
ly

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- (1) Land Records of Montgomery County, Md. (2) Interview with Albert J. McClure, Exec. Dir., RNRF, 897-8720. (3) Farquhar, R.B., Old Homes & History of Montgomery County (1962) pp. 320-322. (4) Reed, Pat, Editor, The Tiger's Territory, North Bethesda Junior High School PTSA, Bethesda, Md., Nov. 1976 (5) The Renewable Natural Resources Foundation booklet, 1974.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 47 acres

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

### LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE NONE COUNTY

STATE COUNTY

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Marsha Mai/Roy Gauzza

ORGANIZATION

Sugarloaf Regional Trails

DATE

Fall 1978

STREET & NUMBER

Box 87

TELEPHONE

926-4510

CITY OR TOWN

Dickerson

STATE

Maryland 20753

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory 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  
The Shaw House, 21<sup>st</sup> State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 267-1438

SUGARLOAF REGIONAL TRAILS  
Box 87, Stronghold  
Dickerson, Md. 20753  
(301) 926-4510

Wild Acres -- Grosvenor Estate

## Personal Significance of Gilbert H. Grosvenor

Gilbert Harvey Grosvenor, scientist and educator, is widely known as the former director and president of the National Geographic Society and editor of the society's monthly magazine for over fifty years. Under his guidance the society became the world's largest organization of its kind. The major exploratory expeditions sponsored by National Geographic were made possible by Grosvenor's success in economic management of the Society in its earliest days. Included in such explorations were the discovery trip to the North Pole, the discovery of the oldest dated work of man in the Americas, and the greatest undersea descent in the Atlantic. Gilbert Grosvenor was also responsible for the Society's famous map service, one of the standard sources of reference throughout the country today.

A mountain range in Antarctica, a lake in Alaska, a fish, and a glacier in the Peruvian Andes were given Grosvenor's name in recognition of his distinguished services to the science of geography. He received many honorary degrees, and the first Grosvenor Medal Award from the National Geographic Society. He has been decorated by France, Norway, and Belgium.

