

# Wild Acres

Nomination of Resource # 30-15 for *Master Plan for Historic Preservation*

*by Julia Weller*

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# Overview of Presentation

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- Prior Evaluations of Significance of Wild Acres
- Ch. 24A-3 Criteria for Designation of Resource
- Wild Acres' Historical and Cultural Significance
- Wild Acres' Architectural and Design Significance
  - Manor House
  - Carriage House
  - Gardener's Cottage
- Historical Integrity of Estate
- Conclusion

# Prior Evaluations of Significance

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- ❑ Wild Acres appears in Roger Brook Farquhar, Jr.'s 1962 *Old Homes and History of Montgomery County, Maryland*
- ❑ Included as a potential historic property in the *Locational Atlas and Index of Historic Sites*, published 1976
- ❑ Surveyed and documented as significant by Sugarloaf Regional Trails for the Maryland Historical Trust, 1978
- ❑ Determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places for its historical and architectural significance by Federal Highway Administration and Maryland Historical Trust, 2000
- ❑ Historic significance highlighted in a December 1981 article in *Journal of Forestry* by Barry Walden Walsh, an SAF staff writer, entitled *Historic Wild Acres*. Contained photo of colonial boundary marker with carved initials of early owner

# Ch. 24A-3 Historic Preservation Ordinance Criteria

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## □ **Historical and Cultural Criteria:**

- (1)a. *has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county...*
- (1)c. *is identified with a person or persons who influenced society*

## □ **Architectural and Design Criteria**

- (2)a. *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*
- (2)b. *represents the work of a master*

**Historical and Cultural Significance: (1)a.** *has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county...*

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- Wild Acres is representative of the country estates which grew up along Rockville Pike in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Rockville-Chevy Chase became popular with wealthy Washingtonians after area made accessible with establishment of trolley car and improvements to Pike
- Ranks among finest, alongside 1914 Classical Revival **Corby Estate**, designed for Charles Corby, a bread manufacturer & inventor; 1931 monumental Beaux Arts style **Marwood House**, designed for Samuel K. Martin III, heir to a Chicago fortune; and 1927-28 **Woodend**, another Classical Revival mansion designed for Chester Wells, naval officer, and wife Marian Wells, an Australian heiress

**Historical and Cultural Significance: (1)a.** *has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county... Wild Acres as a Farm circa 1918*

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**Picture ID:** 286049

**Picture File:** 02540\_194.jpg

**Photographer:** DR. GILBERT H. GROSVENOR

**Legend:** Full-length view of the Grosvenors' well-built barn, which has glass windows and sliding wooden doors. The small figures of teenaged Melville B. Grosvenor petting a pinto pony and another man looking on appear in the picture.

**Historical and Cultural Significance:** (1)a. *has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county... Wild Acres as a Farm circa 1918*

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**Picture ID:** 286052

**Picture File:** 02540\_197.jpg

**Photographer:** DR. GILBERT H. GROSVENOR

**Legend:** Circa 1918, Melville Bell Grosvenor sits to the far left of several rabbit hutches containing white and brown rabbits in various stages of maturity. Straw hangs from the cages and covers the ground.

**Historical and Cultural Significance: (1)a.** *has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county Farm and Manor—circa 1929*

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**Historical and Cultural Significance: (1)a.** *has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county Wild Acres—circa 1929*

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**Historical and Cultural Significance: (1)a.** *has character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the county Wild Acres—1950s*

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**Picture ID:** 905295

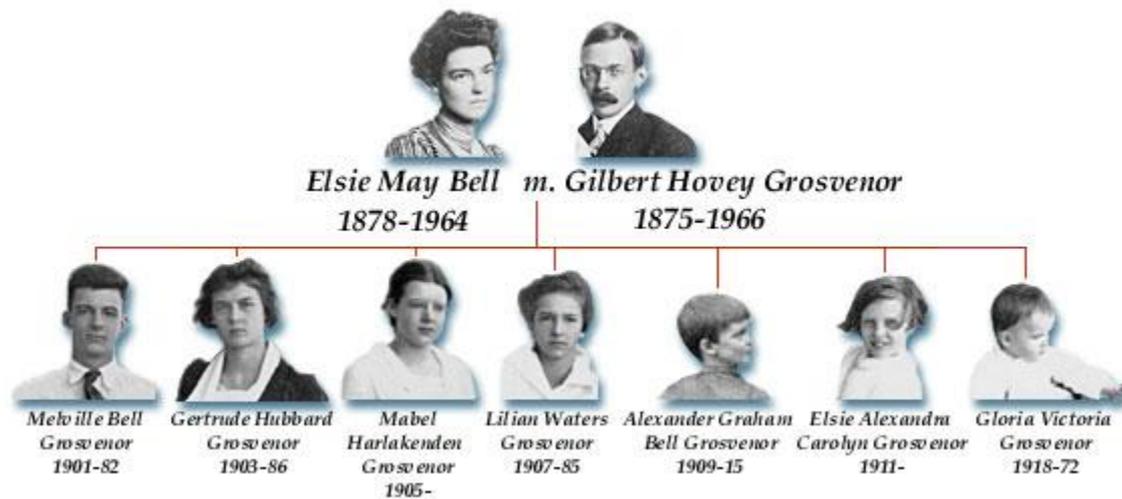
**Picture File:** 03100\_7278.jpg

**Photographer:** VICTOR R. BOSWELL, JR

**Legend:** Exterior view of the Grosvenor home in Maryland.

# Historical and Cultural Significance: (1)c. *is identified with a person or persons who influenced society*

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## Historical and Cultural Significance: (1)c. *is identified with a person or persons who influenced society*

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Gilbert H. Grosvenor (1875-1966) as Editor, turned the *National Geographic Magazine* into a household name

He and his wife lived on Wild Acres for 40 years and celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary there with 500 guests



## Historical and Cultural Significance: (1)c. *is identified with a person or persons who influenced society*

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Wife Elsie May Bell Grosvenor was daughter of Alexander Graham Bell who was a frequent visitor to the farm



**Picture ID:** 844954

**Picture File:** 02540\_1798.jpg

**Photographer:** BELL COLLECTION

**Legend:** Alexander Graham Bell and his daughter Daisy Marian Fairchild at Wild Acres.

**Historical and Cultural Significance: (1)c. *is identified with a person or persons who influenced society***  
**Birthday Party for Wife of Chief Justice Taft**

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**Architectural and Design: (2)a.** *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*

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## **The Manor House**

- Fine example of Tudor Revival architecture, reflecting earlier and later styles in two asymmetrical sections—half-timbering with stucco in-fill on the shorter east end and uncoursed rubblestone on the longer west end
- Asymmetrical appearance more pronounced on north elevation, with windows arranged as singles, pairs and triplets; more classical symmetrical on southern elevation
- Views of sweeping lawns and trees planted by the Grosvenors to attract birds on both elevations

**Architectural and Design: (2)a.** *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*  
Granddaughter Helen Grosvenor laying cornerstone 1928



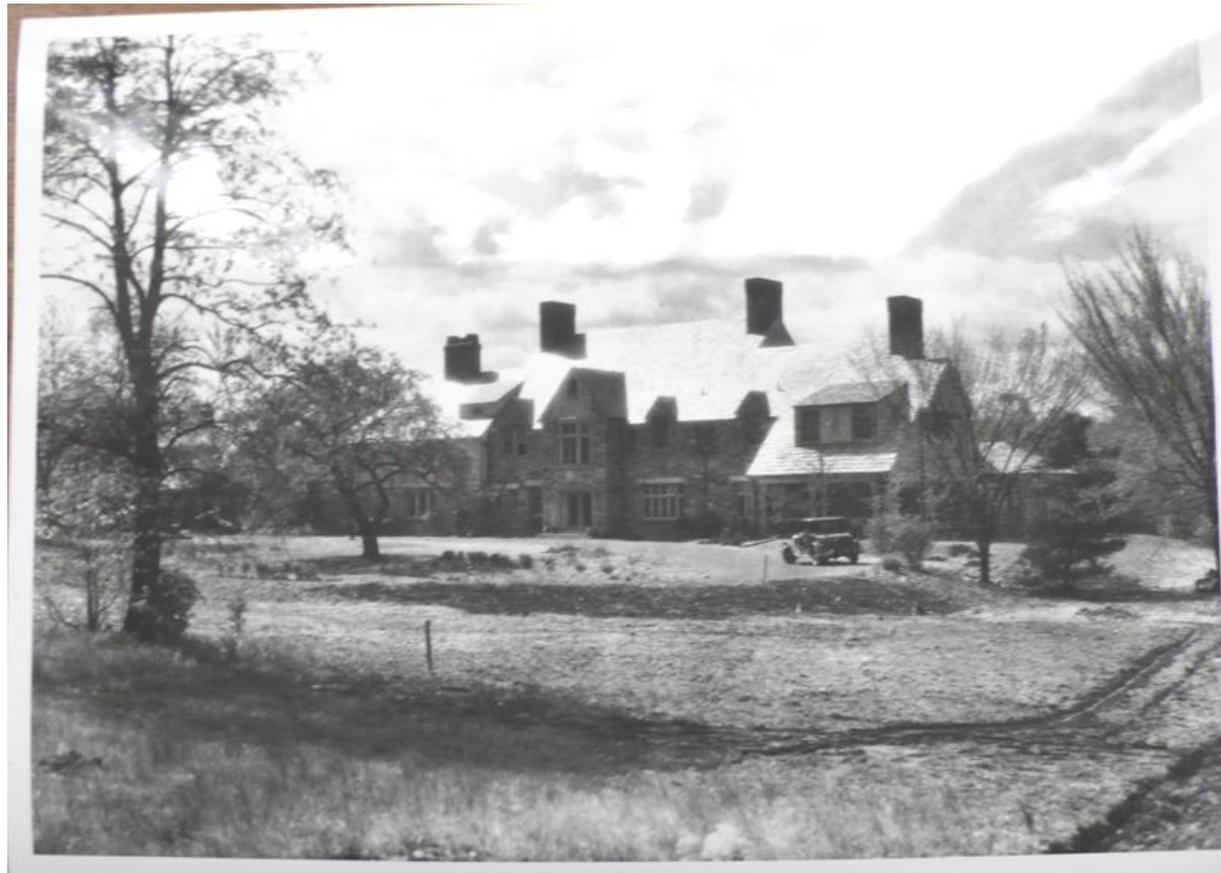
**Architectural and Design: (2)a.** *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*  
Cornerstone containing pamphlets about Wild Acres birds

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**Architectural and Design: (2)a.** *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*  
Manor House—1930s

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**Architectural and Design: (2)a.** *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*  
South Elevation—Adult Grosvenor Children 1933

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**Picture ID:** 286140

**Picture File:** 02540\_285.jpg

**Photographer:** COVILLE, CABOT

**Legend:** In June 1933 the Grosvenor children, all adults, form a human train outside on their lawn. From left to right are Gloria, Carol, Lillian, Mabel, Gertrude, and Melville. Melville is holding the front paws of an Irish setter, who is standing on his hind legs. Another dog, smaller and shaggy, lies on the lawn in front of the group.

# Architectural and Design: (2)a. *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*

## Family Portrait at Wild Acres (South Elevation)



**Picture ID:** 286097

**Picture File:** 02540\_242.jpg

**Photographer:** DR. GILBERT H. GROSVENOR

**Legend:** Grosvenor family portrait taken circa 1930 (possibly Christmastime) in front of a large doorway with a wreath hanging in the window. Standing in the back row, from left to right, are: Cabot Coville, Paxton Blair, Carol Grosvenor, Gloria Grosvenor, Mabel Grosvenor, and Melville Bell Grosvenor. Seated in the front are Lilian Coville with baby Gilbert Coville, Gertrude Blair with Joan Blair, Elsie Bell Grosvenor with Grosvenor Blair, Gilbert H. Grosvenor (President and Editor of the National Geographic Society) with Helen Grosvenor, and Helen Rowland Grosvenor with Alexander Graham Bell Grosvenor II.

## Architectural and Design: (2)a.

Grosvenor Family Arms: “*Deeds Not Words Characterize the Noble*”



# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

Cast of Owl Plaques by Hashime Murayama



# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Cast of Birds Frieze Hashime Murayama

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# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## 1950s Interiors of Manor House

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**Picture ID:** 905279

**Picture File:** 03100\_7262.jpg

**Photographer:** VICTOR R. BOSWELL, JR

**Legend:** Interior view of the Grosvenor home in Maryland.

# Architectural and Design: (2)a. Architectural Drawings of Manor House—South Elevation







# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

Manor House—South Elevation, undated

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# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Manor House—South Elevation 1950s

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**Picture ID:** 905294

**Picture File:** 03100\_7277.jpg

**Photographer:** VICTOR R. BOSWELL, JR

**Legend:** Exterior view of the Grosvenor home in Maryland.

# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Manor House—South Elevation 2008

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# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Manor House—South Elevation 2008

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# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Manor House—North Elevation 1950s

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**Figure ID:** 905296

**Figure File:** 03100\_7279.jpg

**Photographer:** VICTOR R. BOSWELL, JR

**Legend:** Exterior view of the Grosvenor home in Maryland.

# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Manor House—North Elevation 1950s (West)

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**Picture ID:** 905297

**Picture File:** 03100\_7280.jpg

**Photographer:** VICTOR R. BOSWELL, JR

**Legend:** Exterior view of the Grosvenor home in Maryland.

# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Manor House—North Elevation 2008

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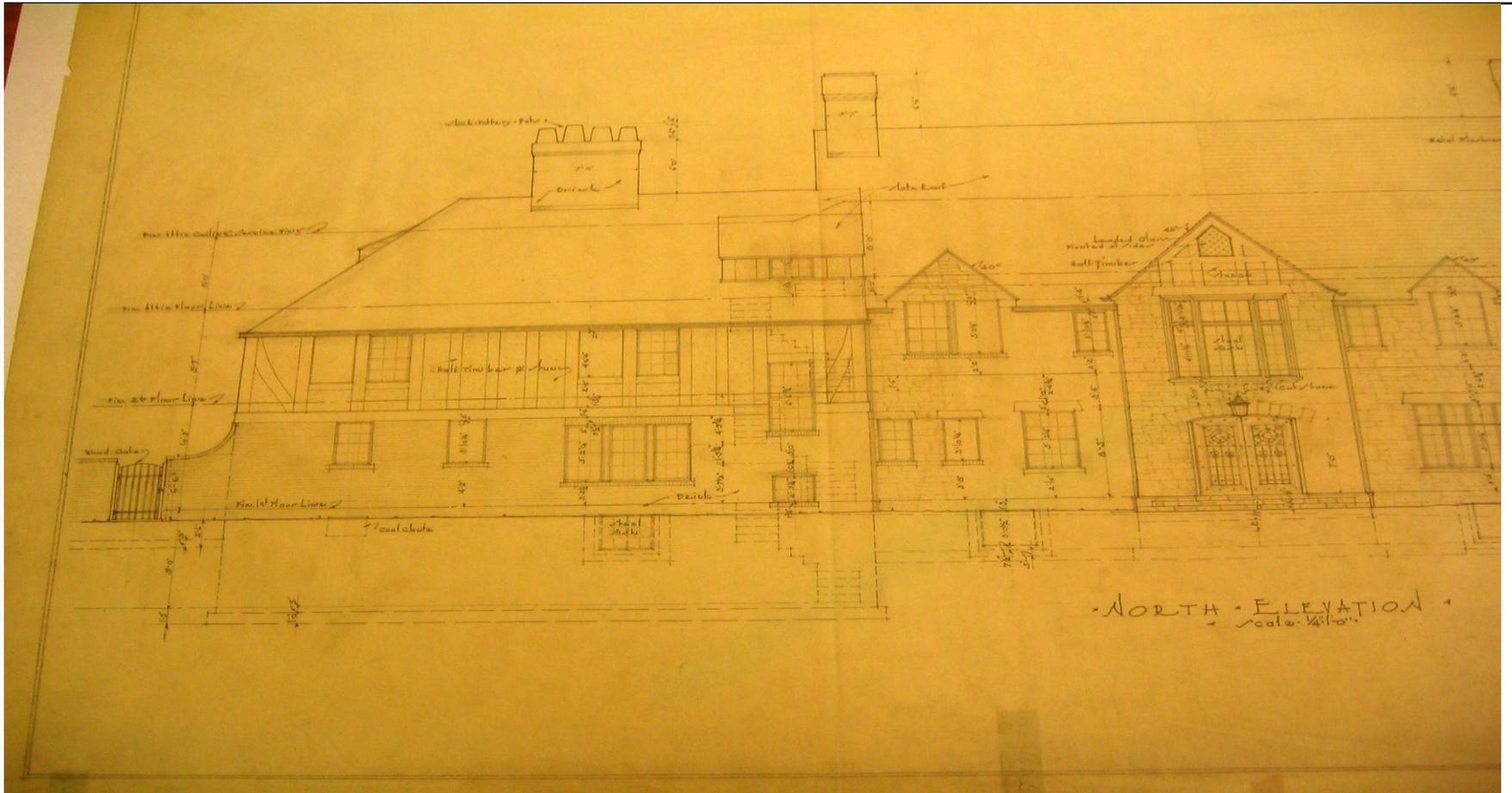
# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Manor House—North Elevation (East) 2008

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# Architectural and Design: (2)a. Architectural Drawings of Manor House—North Elevation (East)



# Architectural and Design: (2)a. Architectural Drawings of Manor House—North Elevation (West)

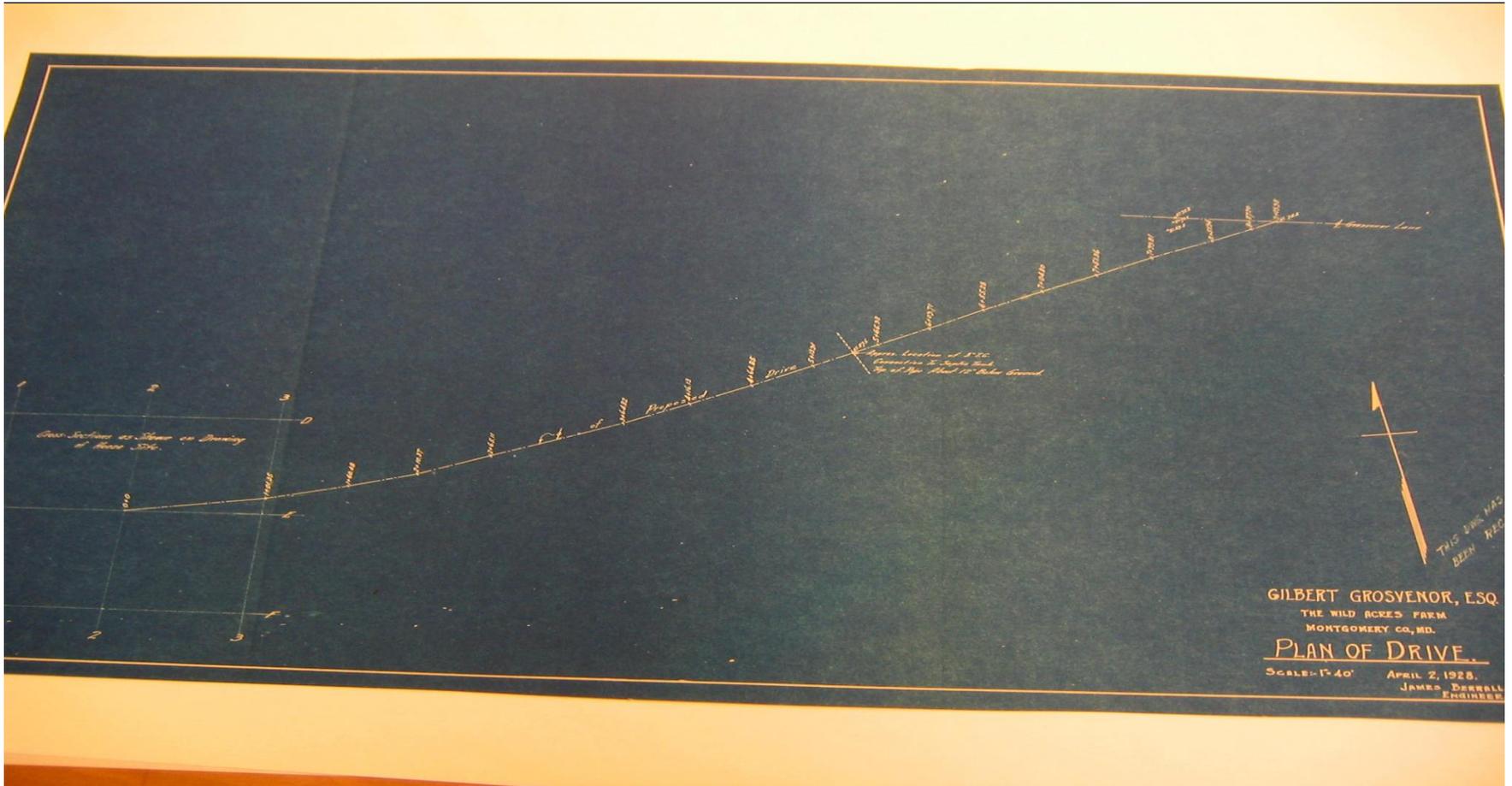






# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Architectural Drawings of Driveway



**Architectural and Design: (2)a.** *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*

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## **The Carriage House**

- Designed as a visual extension of the east section of manor house—false half-timbering with stucco in-fill
- On same East-West axis as house
- Built at the same time
- Clearly intended as an integral component of the house

**Architectural and Design: (2)a.** *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*

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**Architectural and Design: (2)a.** *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*

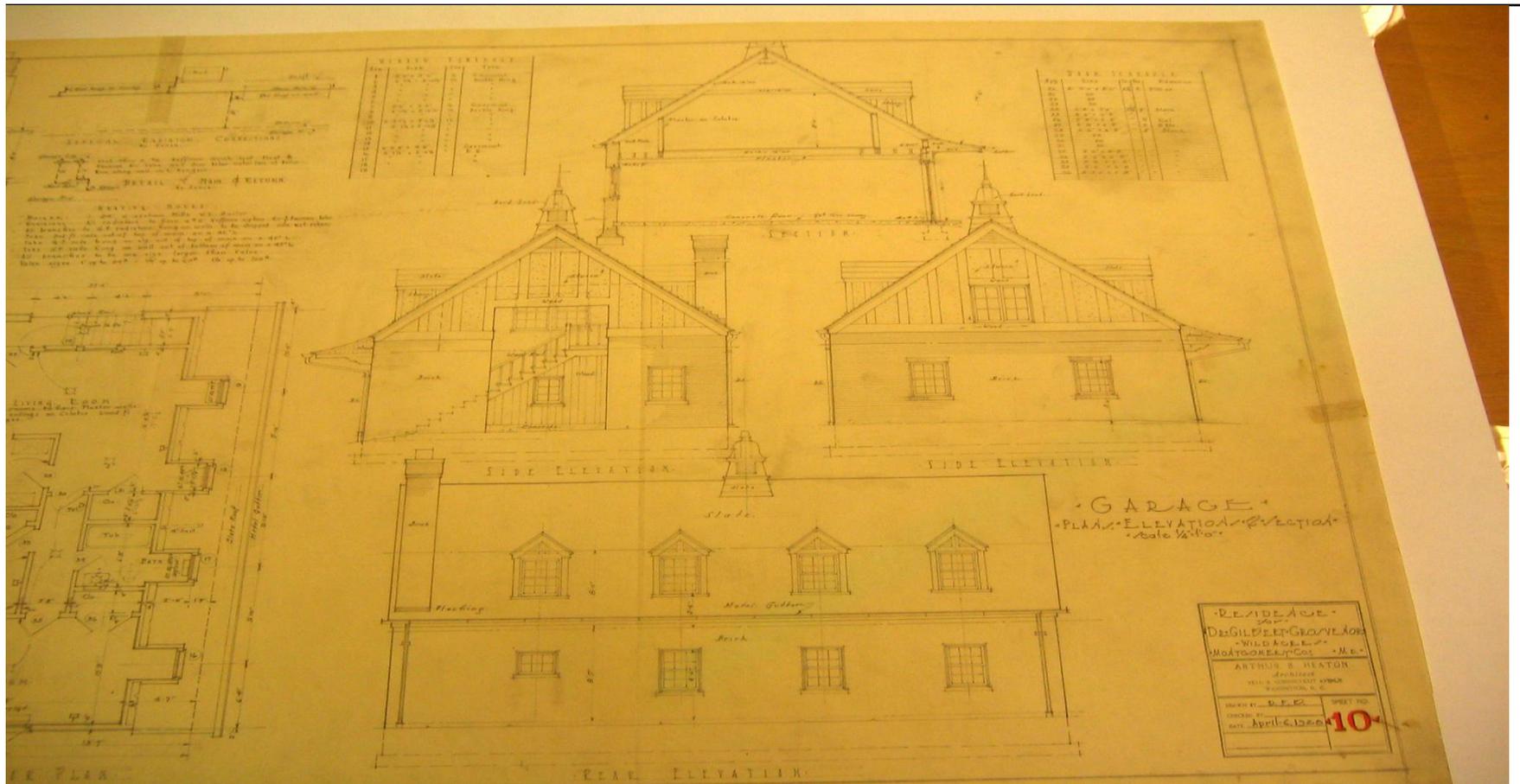
Manor House and Carriage House Built Together

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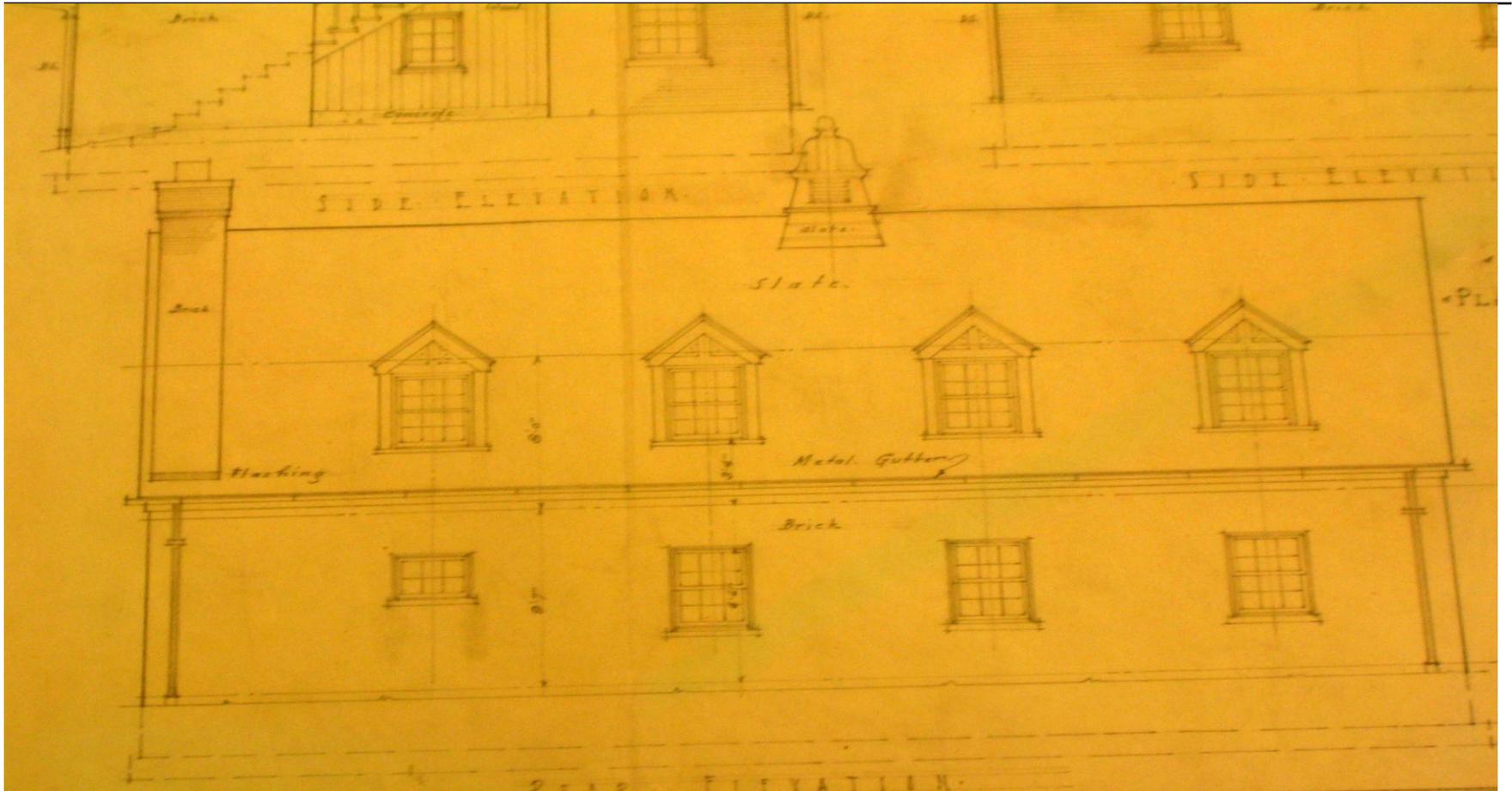
# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Architectural Drawings of Carriage House



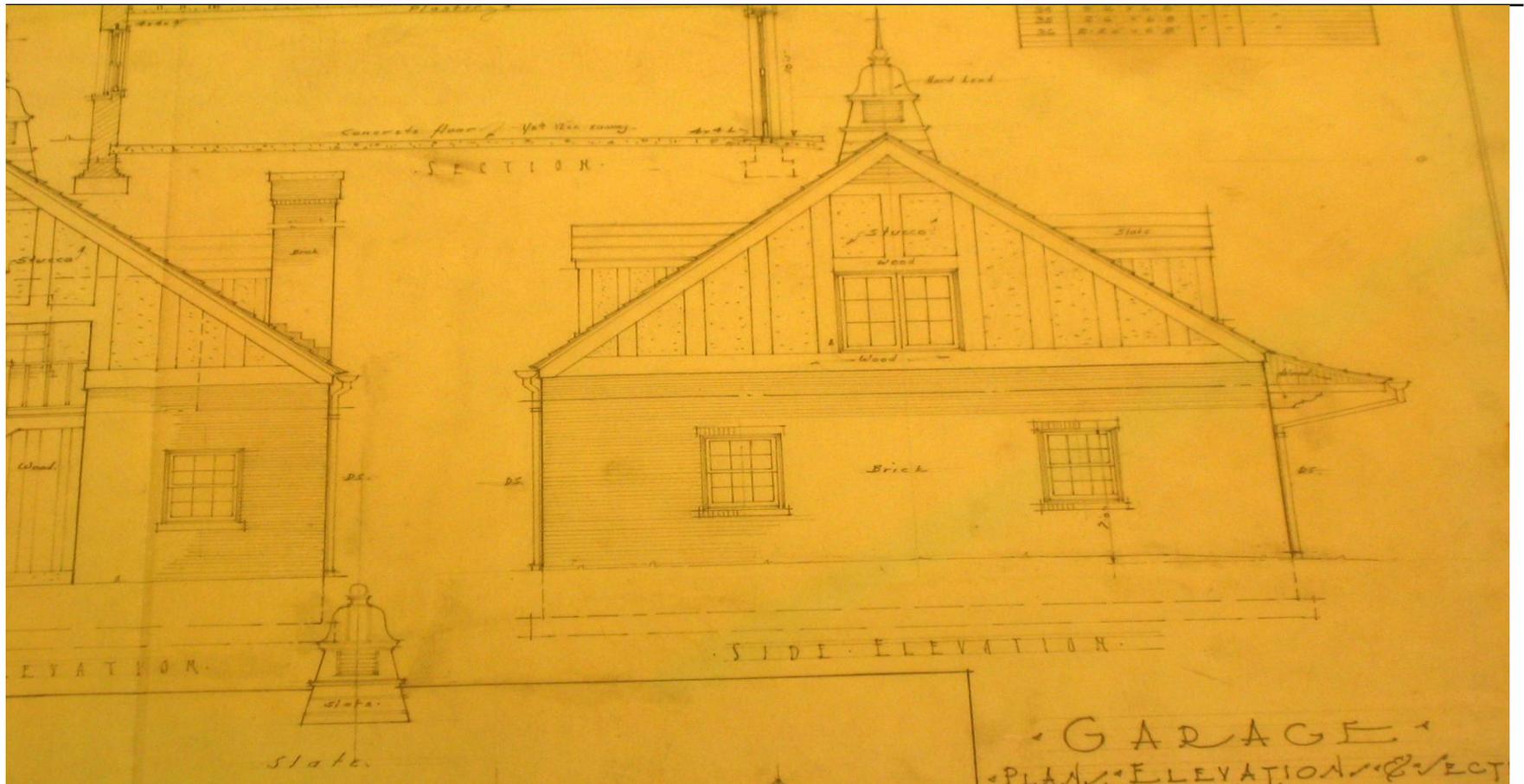
# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Architectural Drawings of Carriage House (South Elevation)



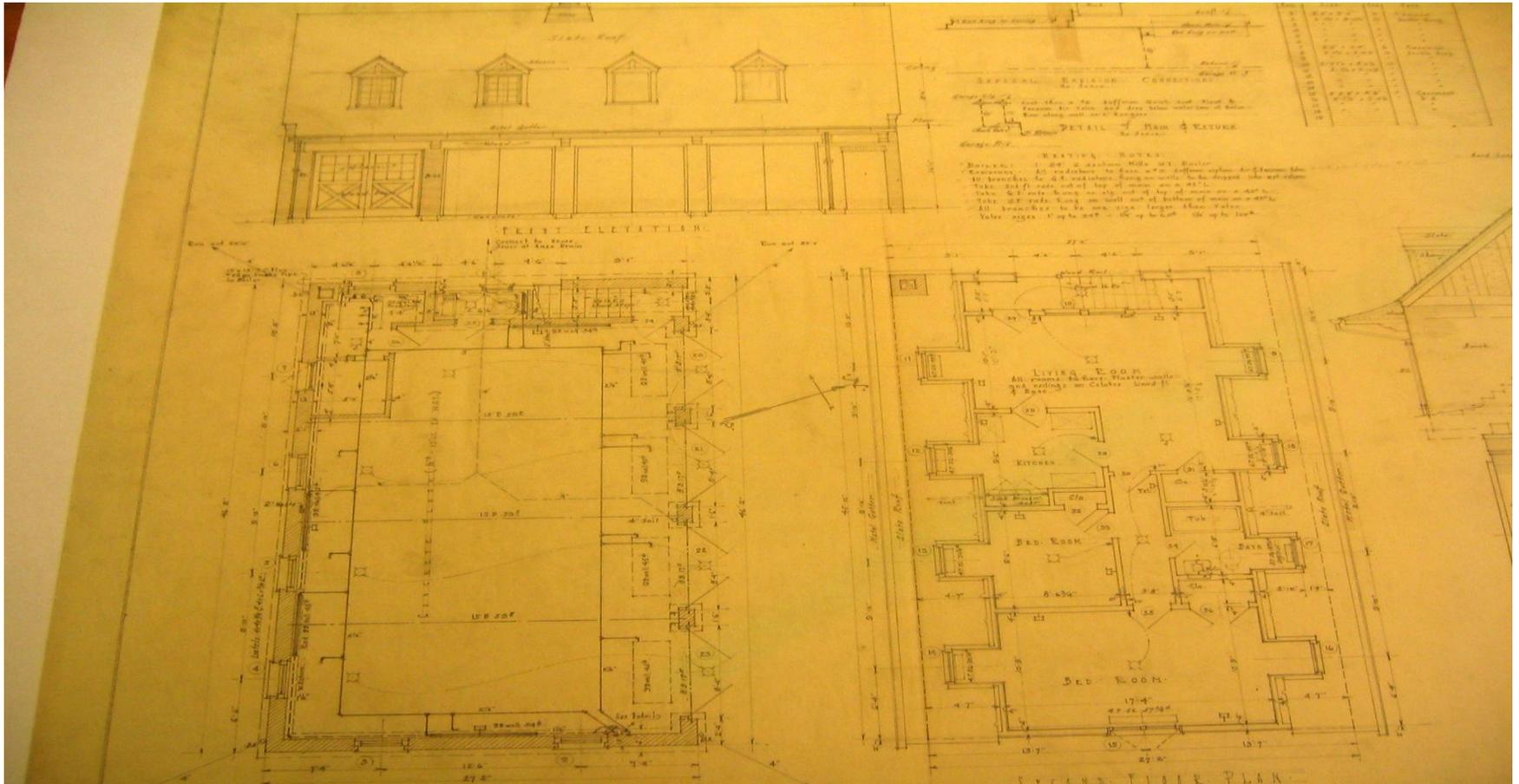
# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Architectural Drawings of Carriage House (Side Elevation)



# Architectural and Design: (2)a.

## Architectural Drawings of Carriage House (Upper and Lower Levels)



**Architectural and Design: (2)a.** *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*

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## **The Gardener's Cottage**

- Built in 1913 for caretaker to look after estate in winter when unheated farm house not in use by Grosvenors
- Designed by Arthur B. Heaton in Craftsman style characterized by practical, simple design, in reaction to the elaborate ornamentation of the Victorian-era houses
- Design elements include exposed rafter tails and beam ends and a cut-away porch

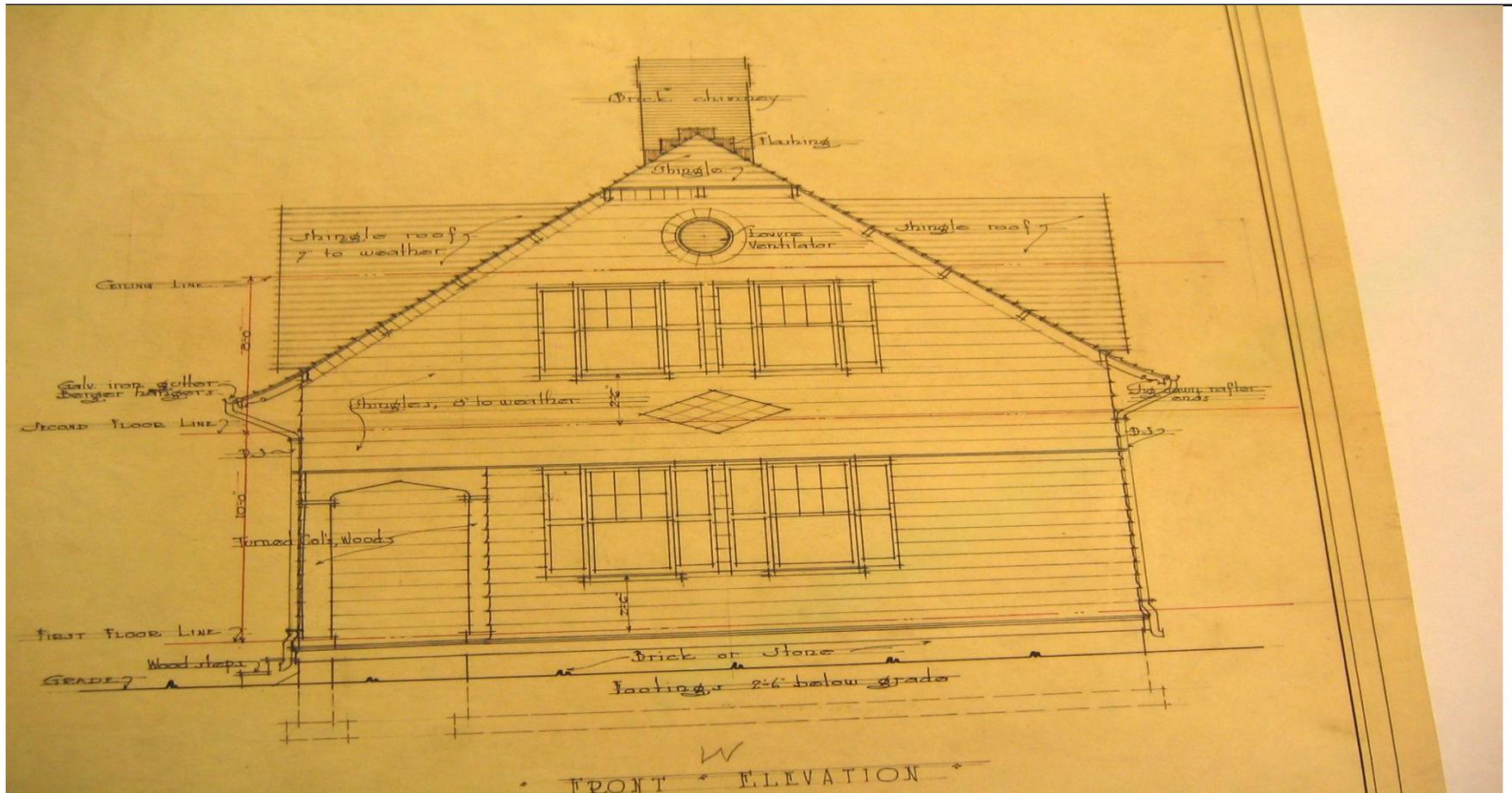
**Architectural and Design: (2)a.** *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*  
Gardener's Cottage—Front Elevation

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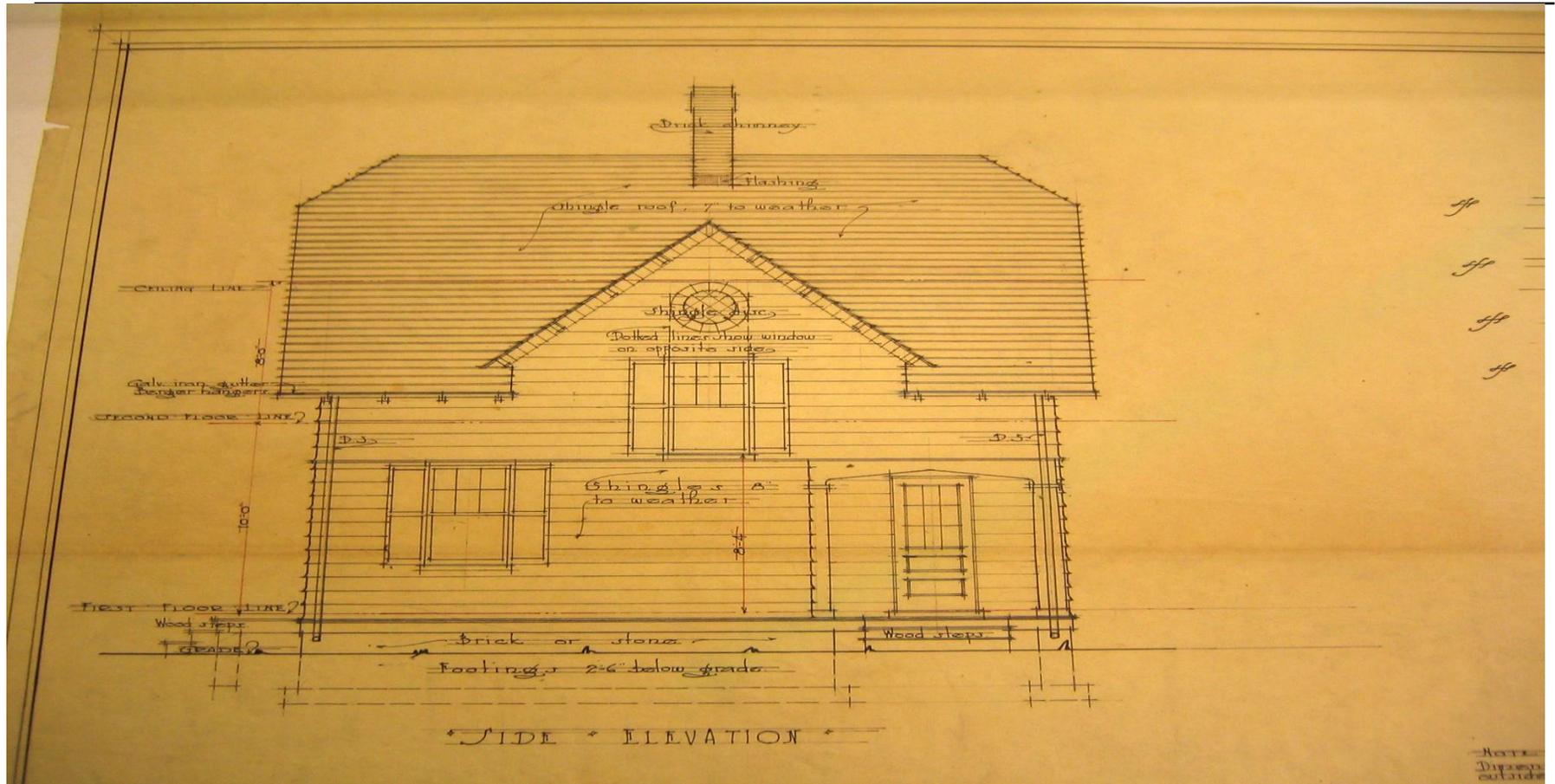
# Architectural and Design: (2)a. *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*

## Architectural Drawings of Gardener's Cottage (Front View)



# Architectural and Design: (2)a. *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*

## Architectural Drawings—Side Elevation



**Architectural and Design: (2)a.** *embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction*  
Gardener's Cottage—Rear Elevation

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## Architectural and Design Significance: (2)b *represents the work of a master*

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- ❑ Wild Acres designed by Arthur Berthrong Heaton (1875-1951), a prominent architect for 50 years
- ❑ Heaton held many important posts—Supervisory architect of the Washington Cathedral and Associate Architect for George Washington University
- ❑ Prodigious and varied output—major work for successful real estate developer Shannon & Luchs (more than 500 residences for them in Burleith); many homes in Cleveland Park in D.C., several apartment buildings, small commercial buildings, school
- ❑ Early car enthusiast—designed nationally acclaimed Park and Shop in Cleveland Park and one of earliest commercial automobile parking garages, the now demolished Capital Garage.

## **Architectural and Design Significance: (2)b** *represents the work of a master (cont.)*

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- ❑ Heaton was known for a variety of eclectic academic revival architectural styles—remodeled Corby mansion on Chevy Chase Circle in Tudor Revival style and designed National Geographic buildings on 16<sup>th</sup> St. in D.C. in Italian Renaissance style
- ❑ Leader of “renovize Washington” during Depression--led to his role as founder of Washington Building Congress; active in Washington Board of Trade; served as President of Washington Chapter of American Institute of Architects in 1935
- ❑ He was honored as a Fellow of the AIA, one of highest honors an American architect can be afforded by his/her peers
- ❑ Heaton was well known to Gilbert Grosvenor from social connections to GWU and the Cosmos Club

# Historical Integrity of Estate

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- The historic resources of the property—the mansion house, garage and caretaker’s house—contribute to the historic and architectural importance of the property
- Wild Acres retains a high degree of historic integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association
- Although the extent of the estate’s historic acreage has been diminished substantially from the original 110 acres purchased by the Grosvenors, the acreage encompassed by this nomination retains sufficient integrity to convey the estate’s historic semi-rural, suburban character
- The two modern office buildings on an adjacent parcel have been sensitively sited and compatibly detailed, thus not detracting significantly from the immediate historic environment of the house.
- These resources combined with their intact immediate historic acreage convey the property’s significance as a relatively rare Tudor Revival style country estate designed by a master architect and built between the wars in outlying Montgomery County for a prominent Washington family

# Conclusion – Wild Acres Qualifies for Master Plan for Historic Preservation

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- Unusual survivor of estate carved out of farmland during the pre-suburban period of Bethesda's history – Ch. 24A-3(1)a.
- Home for 40 years of Gilbert H. Grosvenor and Elsie May Bell Grosvenor, influential Editor of the National Geographic Magazine and President of the National Geographic Society—Ch. 24A-3(1)c.
- House and garage are excellent examples of Tudor Revival design typical of wealthy country estates of end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century; gardener's cottage is prime example of Craftsman style of the period—Ch. 24A-3(2)a.
- Designed by a master architect Arthur B. Heaton—Ch. 24A-3(2)b.
- Integrity of resources has been successfully retained

# Acknowledgements and Thanks

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- ❑ Photographs from the Montgomery County Historical Society Collection, Rockville, MD (all historic photos except family tree and Dr. Alexander Graham Bell)
- ❑ Architectural Drawings from Library of Congress, Arthur B. Heaton Collection, ADE Units 965 and 966
- ❑ National Geographic Society Archives (1930s photo of mansion with car)