

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JUL 22 1980
DATE ENTERED	SEP 17 1980

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Presby Memorial Iris Gardens Horticultural Center

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

474 Upper Mountain Avenue (see maps attached)

—NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Montclair

— VICINITY OF

11th

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

New Jersey

CODE

34

COUNTY

Essex

CODE

013

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 type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<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 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 Citizens Committee of the Presby Memorial Gardens of Montclair, Inc.
and the Town of Montclair

STREET & NUMBER

474 Upper Mountain Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Montclair

— VICINITY OF

STATE

New Jersey

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Essex County Court House

STREET & NUMBER

High Street at Market Street

CITY, TOWN

Newark

STATE

New Jersey

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

N.J. Historic Sites Inventory

DATE

—FEDERAL STATE —COUNTY —LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Office of Historic Preservation

CITY, TOWN

Trenton

STATE

New Jersey

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" 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

The mid-nineteenth century residence at 474 Upper Mountain Avenue, Upper Montclair, New Jersey, owned by the Citizens' Committee of the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens of Montclair, Inc. is a three story, almost square Victorian structure showing both Second Empire and Italianate influences. It has a mansard roof covered with fishscale shingles above the third floor level. The flat upper roof probably has a sheet metal base. It now covered with tar and felt. The main cornice is supported by curved wooden brackets spaced about two feet on centers. The exterior frames of windows and doors are free adaptations of classic moldings, with whimsical Victorian touches. Windows in general are two panes over two, but the rear wing has several six over six windows, which appeared to be earlier than the others.

The Walthers made alterations to the building from time to time including: (1) removal of a partition, two fireplaces, a chimney, which originally separated the two southside parlors; (2) built a new chimney and fireplace on the south wall of the above converted living room; (3) removed a back stair and installed an elevator; (4) installed a new first floor bathroom; (5) modernized the kitchen; (6) rebuilt the long east porch with plain posts and cornice.

None of the above changes affected severely the overall mid-nineteenth century character of the house.

The interior trim, built up of heavy classic moldings about 9" wide, is typical of a style which became fashionable about that time in northern New Jersey. The main entrance with its double doors and transom is a good example of this trend.

The rooms and halls, upstairs and down, are distinguished by complex run plaster cornices and most of the ceilings have fancy molded plaster medallions centered in the rooms for the hanging of lighting fixtures. The garage shown on the plot plan is an open fronted lean-to type structure built circa 1940 which is used to store equipment and supplies used in connection with the Citizens' Committee's property and the Iris Gardens.

The foundation for a former brownstone home formerly located on the property is indicated with a dotted line on the plot plan.

Attached is a map specifically delineating the boundaries of the nominated property which includes the House and the Iris Gardens.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input 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 checked="" 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) Horticultural
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1922-27

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Landscaper - John Wister

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Presby Memorial Iris Gardens is an internationally recognized horticultural site which has specialized in the cultivation, development, and study of irises since its creation in 1927.

The building associated with the gardens was built around 1860 and is a good local expression of Second Empire pattern book architecture with Italianate features.

The gardens themselves were planned by landscape architect John Wister, a noted botanist of the early to mid 20th century. Wister wrote several botany books in his lifetime, one of which, The Iris (1927) is considered a classic in its genre.

This application covers both an architecturally significant Victorian home owned for many years by the Walthers and an adjacent complex of internationally renowned iris gardens maintained under the supervision of the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens of Montclair, Inc., and approximately three acres of park land owned by the Town of Montclair.

A sandstone house formerly standing on the property (see dotted outline on the enclosed map) was used by a number of different farmers who worked this land. George A. Dittig, a farmer who acquired the property in 1853, lived in this sandstone house. Some time prior to 1860, he decided to build for himself and his family a mansion which is the house for which historic site designation is being sought. The house was finished sometime prior to 1860. It is believed that the sandstone house was demolished sometime just prior to the First World War.

In 1919, the property was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Frederick P. Walther. Mr. Walther was an engineer employed in the insurance industry to rate towns and buildings on their fire ratings. Mr. Walther was transferred to New York from Chicago around 1914.

Mrs. Walther was a leader in the effort to obtain the vote for women. When the 19th Amendment was passed, Mrs. Walther was one of those suffragette leaders whom Colonel House phoned from the White House to relay President Wilson's congratulations.

The coming of the railroad permitted businessmen to commute daily to New York City. This caused a conversion of land use from farms to residential. The west edge of Montclair is bounded by the Watchung Mountains. Those visiting and living in the town while it was a farming community looked across open fields to a wooded hillside topped in some areas by a hundred foot cliff, obviously a beautiful vista. By the end of World War I, the only area in Montclair where this vista was still extant was looking west over the open field just to the north of the Walther property. Mrs.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED
UTM NOT VERIFIED

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 7.75

1:24,000

QUADRANGLE NAME Orange, NJ

QUADRANGLE SCALE

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,8 56,69,7,0 4,52,24,4,0

B 1,8 56,69,5,0 4,52,21,7,0

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C 1,8 56,67,6,0 4,52,23,7,0

D 1,8 56,68,8,0 4,52,24,8,0

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The horticultural center is located on Lot 26, Block 802 and that portion of Mountain-side Park containing the iris gardens is delineated on attached map prepared by R. P. Vicari dated February 13, 1980.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

Revised by the Office of Historic Preservation

NAME / TITLE

William B. Grant, Vice Chairman

ORGANIZATION Citizens Committee of the Presby Memorial
Iris Gardens of Montclair, Inc.

DATE

2/18/1980

STREET & NUMBER
474 Upper Mountain Avenue

TELEPHONE (201) 783-5000
(201) 783-5974

CITY OR TOWN
Upper Montclair

STATE
New Jersey 07042

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

STATE

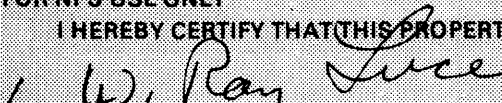
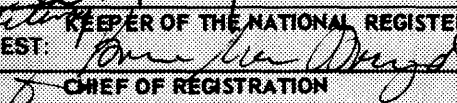
LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE 

TITLE Deputy Commissioner, Dept. of Environmental Protection

DATE 6-25-80

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
 W. Ray Luce KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	DATE <u>9/17/80</u>
ATTEST:  CHIEF OF REGISTRATION	DATE <u>9-17-80</u>

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7. DESCRIPTION (Continued)

The overall setting is as follows: Mountainside Park is a Montclair municipal park located in the northwest end of the Town of approximately 33 acres in size. The park is intersected by Highland Avenue and Upper Mountain Avenue, two main north/south Montclair streets. The approximately 3.5 acres east of Upper Mountain is flat and is actively used for tennis (8 municipal clay courts), swimming (a small municipal pool open in the summer only), basketball (a small paved court) and softball or touch football depending on the season. The southern half of the sloping field between Upper Mountain and Highland is used for the iris gardens and the northern half, separated by a hedge of brush and trees, is used for sledding in the winter. West of Highland is a steep tree covered slope through which rambles a nature trail maintained by the Montclair Parks Department and the Montclair Nature Center who conduct educational tours on the fauna and geology of the area for school children and other groups. On the top of the hill to the west but not visible from Montclair is the 115 acre Mills reservation maintained by Essex County.

The Victorian property (Lot 26, Block 802) owned by the Citizens' Committee of the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens of Montclair, Inc. is approximately 1.43 acres in size, fronts the west side of Upper Mountain Avenue at the south end of Mountainside Park.

Sought for historical site designation is the 1 1/2 acre and Victorian house and that portion of Mountainside Park covered by the iris gardens as laid out on the enclosed maps.

The Iris Gardens are slightly larger than six acres and in a vaguely rectangular configuration lenthwise going north to south. The east-west traverse rises to the west. Most of the iris beds are at the eastern portion although there are two connected beds in the western end along Highland Avenue.

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (Continued)

Walther was ahead of her time in appreciating the value of preserving land in a park for passive use and for this vista. It was her belief that such an area put into a park could be as valuable to the spirit as was a recreation area in a park for the body.

Mrs. Walther approached the governing body to attempt to persuade them to acquire the open fields to the north of her property for this purpose. The elected officials expressed some reservation and said that they would not be willing to acquire the property for that purpose unless she was able to bring in a petition seeking this with 5,000 signatures. Mobilizing many sectors of the town including the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts, the 5,000 signatures were acquired. The governing body advised her that not all of the 5,000 signatures were those of registered voters. However, they did agree to put the matter on the ballot. Again a massive educational effort was organized by Mrs. Walter and in the election of November 8, 1921, the people of Montclair did vote in a nonbinding referendum to have the Town acquire this area as a park. The Commission then moved to implement the citizens' decision, passing an ordinance appropriating the necessary funds on February 14, 1922.

Montclair's mayor at that time, Mayor Lardner, expressed some reservation about the ability of the Town to supervise the type of project Mrs. Walter had in mind for the preservation of this open space, and he requested Mrs. Walther to chair a citizens' committee whose task it would be to be responsible for implementing the people's wishes.

Mrs. Walther accepted this challenge. The citizens' committee was formed and a decision was made by the citizens' committee with the concurrence of the governing body to establish an iris garden. Mr. John Wister, an internationally known horticulturist and hybridizer, agreed to lay out the beds. Mr. Wister was founding director of the American Iris Society. Mrs. Walther was chairman of the citizens' committee which was responsible for these iris gardens until her death in 1977. She lived in the Victorian home for which historical site status is being sought adjacent to these iris gardens during that entire time.

Mrs. Walther was a well-known and highly regarded horticulturist in her own right. She developed her own property with rare plant material, much of which remains and is cared for by the present owners of the home.

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (Continued)

The iris gardens on the Town property were named the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens in 1927 in honor of Mr. Frank Presby, a prominent Montclair resident, a director of the Montclair Art Museum and a leader in other community endeavors. Mr. Presby was also a founding director of the American Iris Society. Under Mrs. Walther's constant care and supervision, these iris gardens became the finest collection of all kinds of iris in the United States if not the world. Iris gardens in Dallas, Texas, and in Florence, Italy, display plaques describing their debt to these Montclair gardens for many of their specimen plantings.

Mrs. Walther was honored with a number of awards for her contribution in bringing Montclair and New Jersey the distinction of having perhaps the finest iris gardens in the world. In 1962, she was awarded the Joint Service Clubs Annual Award by the service clubs of Montclair. She was awarded the "Golden Plants" Award by the Men's Garden Club of America, an award given to outstanding women gardeners.

The gardens reached two pinnacles of international recognition when the American Iris Society held its 41st and 46th Annual Conventions there in 1961 and 1966. The garden is internationally renowned and the Historical Bed alone contains over 900 varieties of iris which predate 1922, including the "Florentina" which dates back to 1500. Some specimens here are no longer found in their native habitat.

Of historical importance to Montclair and indeed to New Jersey is the open sweep of fields from the gardens to the wooded hillside and cliffs a thousand feet to the west. As mentioned earlier, this is the only example of this left in Montclair which looks like what this former farming community looked like in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Iris are one of the few plants that reproduce both vegetatively and sexually. In effect, an iris can live forever, which means that you can have, side by side, many generations of a family. Dr. W. McGarvey of S.U.N.Y (Oswego) has predicted that one day the Presby Gardens will be designated a genetic laboratory because nowhere else in the world except in New Jersey is there so complete a catalogued array of successive generations for the study of genetics.

A non-profit organization, the Citizens Committee for the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens of Montclair, Inc., was formed in 1965 to insure the perpetuity of the iris gardens. This non-profit corporation bought the Walther property in 1977 with the intention of providing a headquarters near the gardens where records could be kept, educational activities carried on, volunteer workers would meet, and garden tools

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (Continued)

could be stored. Thus the house and its yard are really an integral part of the garden complex. This Citizens Committee has also permitted the house to be used by other horticulturally related groups, and this practice is expected to be continued with the Committee retaining the ongoing right to decide if such requested usage conflicts with the goals of the Committee.

The park, gardens, and house form a unique contribution that Monclair and New Jersey should preserve.

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

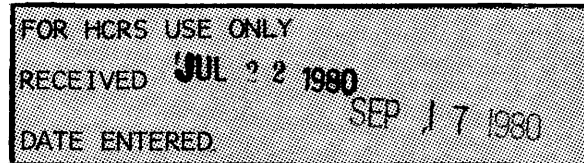


Continuation sheet Bibliography Item number 9 Page 1

	Montclair Times	February 26, 1937
	Montclair Times	May 23, 1953
Deed to Geo. Dettig - Book G 11, page 332	Montclair Times	June 1, 1961
	Montclair Times	July 11, 1963

The Gardeners Chronicle of America, 2/1946.

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**



CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

IRIS MEMORIAL GARDENS

MOUNTAINSIDE PARK

Beginning at a point in the westerly line of Upper Mountain Avenue at the north-east corner of lands now or formerly of Frederick P. Walther, said point being distant 422.83 feet northerly as measured along the said line of Upper Mountain Avenue from its intersection with the northerly line of Laurel Place, and running:

Thence (1) N. 0°-37'-30" E. along the westerly line of Upper Mountain Avenue a distance of 84.96 feet to an angle point in said line;

Thence (2) N. 12°-17'-40"E. and still along the westerly line of Upper Mountain Avenue a distance of 510.00 feet to a point;

Thence (3) N. 78°-16'-30" W. a distance of 341.83 feet to a point in the easterly line of Highland Avenue;

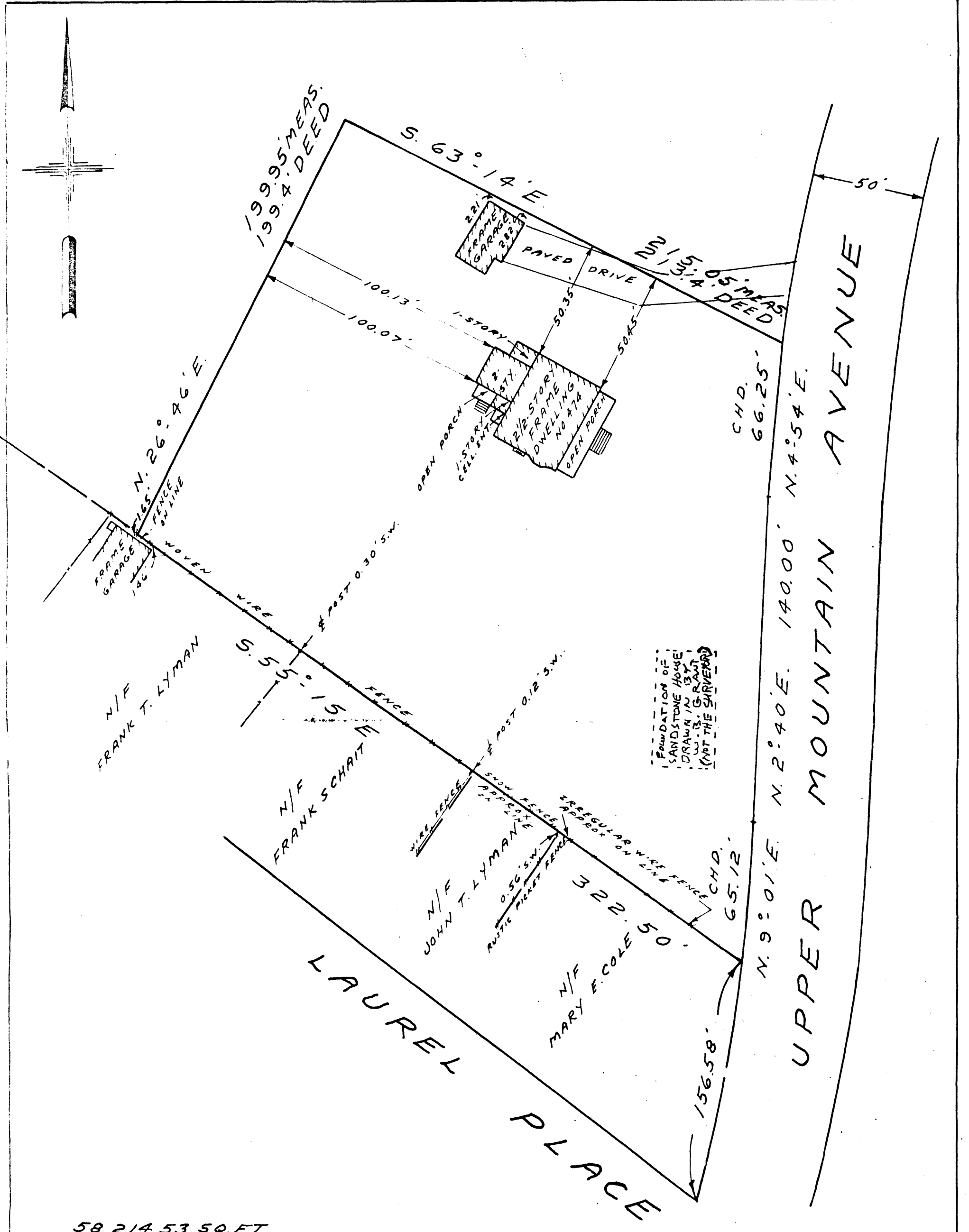
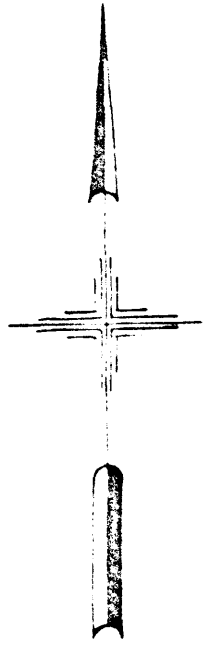
Thence (4) Southerly along the easterly line of Highland Avenue on a curve to the right with a radius of 1029.61 feet, an arc distance of 301.20 feet to a point of tangency in said line;

Thence (5) S. 30°-15'-20" W. and still along the easterly line of Highland Avenue a distance of 411.53 feet to a point;

Thence (6) S. 63°-02'-20" E. a distance of 308.92 feet to a point said point being the southwest corner of lands now or formerly of Frederick P. Walther;

Thence (7) N. 19°-26' E. along the westerly line of said lands of Walther a distance of 199.40 to the northwest corner of lands of Walther;

Thence (8) S. 71°-50'-20" W. along the northerly line of lands of Walther a distance of 213.40 feet to the westerly line of Upper Mountain Avenue the point or place of Beginning.



58,214.53 SQ. FT.

MAP OF PROPERTY SITUATED AT TOWN OF MONTCLAIR, ESSEX COUNTY, N.J.		
PREPARED FOR THE CITIZEN'S COMMITTEE OF THE PRESBY MEMORIAL IRIS GARDENS OF MONTCLAIR, A NEW JERSEY CORPORATION		
SCALE 1" = 40'	This survey is certified to be accurate and correct to the Citizen's Committee of the Presby Memorial Iris Gardens of Montclair, a New Jersey Corporation, and Chicago Title Insurance Company.	ALFRED J. CLARK INC. PROFESSIONAL LAND SURVEYORS 484 BLOOMFIELD AVENUE MONTCLAIR, N.J. 07042 TEL. 201 - 746 - 1036 <i>Alfred J. Clark L.S.</i> ALFRED J. CLARK LICENSE NO. 11135
DATE SEPT. 12, 1977		
REV		
DRAWN R.J.H.		
CHECKED		
REF MAP		
TAX MAP 802-26		
SURVEY 3478		
BK 27F PG 41		

MAP 681 M