

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: WOODMONT

Other Name/Site Number: THE MOUNT OF THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 1622 Spring Mill Road

Not for publication: N/A

City/Town: Gladwyne

Vicinity: NA

State: PA

County: Montgomery

Code: 091

Zip Code: 19035

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: ___

Public-State: ___

Public-Federal: ___

Category of Property

Building(s): ___

District: X

Site: ___

Structure: ___

Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

7

1

1

9

Noncontributing

2 buildings

___ sites

4 structures

___ objects

6 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

PROPERTY NAME**Page 3**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic

Sub: Single dwelling and secondary structures

Current: Religion

Sub: Religious structure, church-related residence

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals: French Renaissance

MATERIALS:

Foundation: Wissahickon schist

Walls: Wissahickon schist, Indiana limestone

Roof: Tile, copper

Other: Bronze

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 4

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Woodmont, the Alan Wood, Jr. estate, is a 73 acre property dramatically situated on steep bluffs overlooking the Schuylkill River in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. The property encompasses a three-story stone manor house and five of the secondary buildings that comprised the original complex -- the former servants quarters, carriage house, dairy barn, guest house, and two gate houses.¹ All are arranged on a rolling landscape with curving carriage drives and sweeping lawns devised as a frame for the picturesque massing of the house. Built in the style of the French chateaux of the Loire Valley, the house is transitional between the late Gothic and the French Renaissance styles. It is among the finest examples in the country of this unusual style, and shows the immediate influence of George W. Vanderbilt's Biltmore at Asheville, North Carolina, which was completed the same year. But Woodmont also reflects the particular interest of its architect in adapting styles to suit local materials and taste, shown here in the use of an expressive asymmetry which contrasts with the more restrained classicism of Hunt's French Renaissance masterpiece.

The design of the house responds closely to the geography of the site. Designed as an extended horizontal composition, it is oriented east-west and set parallel to the ridge above the Schuylkill River. It is approached from the south, following a carefully landscaped passage that screens the house until it appears dramatically across an expansive lawn. This is the principal view, and the house is organized so that this angle is the most lively and picturesque. Seen from the south, the house is an assembly of steep gabled and hipped roof volumes, and a boldly projecting porte-cochere, all of which are dominated by the high pyramidal roof that expresses the Great Hall at the center of the plan.

The house consists of the main block, a lower gabled wing to either side, and a one-and-one-half-story service wing extending to the east. A polygonal porch with a conical roof, now enclosed as a room, terminates the west end of the facade. Construction is entirely of local schist, lightly rusticated and relieved with extensive trim and architectural sculpture in Indiana limestone, including the moldings, belt courses, crockets, finials, copings and archivolt. The roof is variegated red tile² with copper coverings for dormer roofs and turret caps. Ornamental copper crestings framed by needle-thin spires accentuate the height of the roof peaks.

To the west of the main block extends a two-and-one-half story wing, housing a parlor and

¹Alan Wood Jr.'s complete property, which he acquired prior to 1892, consisted of three contiguous lots containing over 400 acres. In addition to the buildings cited, the Woodmont estate included a working farm with two dairy barns, four tenant houses and a greenhouse. There were also three gatehouses, one at situated at each major approach to the house. The adjoining Highland and Bellevue lots were sold in 1929. The size of the Woodmont lot was also slightly reduced in 1952 when it was conveyed to the current owner. The only significant structures related to the original assemblage not included in the lot are two of the gateways, which are intact but separated from the main lots by right-of-ways. The posts themselves are owned by the Palace Mission. *Property Atlas of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: J. L. Smith Co., 1893); Richard G. Wood III., "Remembrances of Woodmont," unpublished manuscript, dated December 15, 1989.

²The house is scrupulously maintained by the current owner. When the roof was renewed in the early 1990s, the tiles were replaced with tiles in varying shades of red, which closely match the original ones in color and design.

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 5

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

library on the first story, and the principal bedrooms of the house above. This section forms a symmetrical composition, consisting of a pair of arched windows on the first story, between which springs the polygonal bay of the second story, with its triplet of mullioned windows. This bay in turn disappears into the wall, reappearing as slender finials in the third story. This is one of the most playful passages of the entire building, as these finials continue above the coping to enframe the gable in a lattice of openwork tracery.

The western facade of this block is a less regular composition, consisting of another steep gable with mullioned windows, shouldered onto a steep chimney on its south side, with a second chimney boldly freestanding to the north. From the first story projects the hexagonal porch, which was fitted for use as an office earlier in this century. It is noteworthy for its individual Gothic portal, consisting of a single flamboyant archway capped by an open parapet and richly crocketed finials.

To the east of the main entrance projects a turreted block, capped by an arrangement of steep, hipped roofs that overlap the central pyramidal roof and create a dynamic asymmetry along the facade. Its roofline is broken by a centrally placed wall dormer of elaborate form and a polygonal turret at the eastern end, crowned by a conical roof of ribbed copper and surmounted by a long slender spire. The turret is carried by a frieze of richly sculpted corbels, including a pair of gargoyles in acrobatic distention. Immediately below this, at the southeast corner of the house, is set the datestone, a square medallion bearing the name *Woodmont*, the date 1892, and the initials *A M H W* (for Alan Wood and his wife, Mary H. Yerkes).

The main entrance is screened by an unusually large porte-cochere which projects outward in two stages; the inner bay forms a covered porch and the outer bay the actual carriage way. Broad segmental arches span the openings and are richly molded and detailed with floral bosses. A carved limestone parapet, ornamented by flamboyant Gothic tracery, caps the porte-cochere and the outer corners are marked by heavy angle buttresses. Of special note is the main door and its ornamental arch. Capped with an elliptical arch, it is richly modeled, its jambs outlined with delicately curving foliage while a pair of angels' heads mark the springing of the arch.

A semi-circular tower marks the transition between the main volume of the house and the lower service wing to the east. The tower is articulated by heavy corbels that separate the mullioned windows of the upper story from a large first story window set under a floriated ogee molding. The service wing itself is a simple rectangular volume with paired gables made picturesque by a slight asymmetry. Nestled into the angle between the tower and this wing is a small porch, dominated by pointed arched openings, that marks the secondary or service entrance to the house. The east end of the facade is completed by a tall chimney and circular porch that balance the hexagonal porch and paired chimneys on the west

The rear elevation is heavily planted and clearly was not intended as a primary vantage point. In material and form it continues the vocabulary established on the front and west elevations. The rear wall of the main volume is organized by a series of gables at roof level: a pair of identical gables on the west end and a single, slightly lower, gable to the east. These volumes are punctuated by groups of paired and triple windows unified by limestone lintels. The gables are capped by sleekly carved feline-shaped finials, which were illustrated in the elevation drawings

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 6

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

that architect William L. Price published in 1894.³ At the ground story level, the west end is enlivened by a polygonal bay surmounted by an arcaded parapet. To the east of it, is a nearly freestanding round pavilion capped by a low tiled roof. When built, this was an open porch; it was enclosed in the early part of this century to serve as a year-round solarium. To the east extends the rear of the service wing which is capped by paired gables.

The plan of the house is an unusual example of the living hall type in which the central space swells to the size of a medieval manor hall. The hall itself is one of most significant features of the house, distinguishing it from the multitude of grand country houses which were built for wealthy industrialists during the period. It rises over fifty feet to the full height of the main roof, and is dominated by an immense limestone fireplace on the north wall and a broad stair that winds up the east wall. The principal rooms of the house open onto this central vessel of space, from a balcony which encircles the upper story. The room is equally remarkable for the degree and quality of the interior finishes. The fireplace is richly carved with medieval figures and heraldic symbols, motifs which are repeated throughout the house. A shield with the initial *W* is set in the panel above the fireplace; below it the frieze is notable for a banner bearing the biblical motto: "where no wood is, there the fire goeth out," a witty play on the family name. The woodwork is exceptionally fine: from the carved linenfold sliding doors to the delicately curved gallery and balustrade with open tracerywork, to the exposed beams at the ceiling, carried on vigorously carved wood corbels.

To the west and north of the Great Hall are the other major public spaces of the house. On the west is a parlor, executed in a lighter, more feminine palette with delicate plaster moldings and a dentillated cornice. The parlor opens directly onto the library through a broad archway on the north. The library is richly paneled with French Renaissance detail including ornamented pilasters and a beamed ceiling. To the north and behind the fireplace is the dining room, which is paneled to ceiling height in shallow Gothic tracery. The ceiling is an elaborate interlacing pattern of alternating squares and ovals, executed in plaster. Of special note are the wooden aedicules to either side of the fireplace which are used as miniature canopies above statues. The hall between the library and dining room opens onto a one-story round room; this is the rear porch that was converted to a solarium.

West of the parlor access to the hexagonal office wing is through paired oak doors which fit seamlessly into the raised paneling of the interior. The ceiling is finished with an elaborate pattern of interlocking trefoils and squares that resembles the decorative ceilings in other parts of the house, including the dining room and the master bedrooms on the second floor. The remaining spaces on the ground story are found to the east and rear of the hall and consist primarily of service and support functions.

The second story of the main block consists of a series of large bedrooms, most with their own bathrooms, that open onto the south, north, and west sides of the hall. The master bedroom, along the west corridor, is richly finished with floor-to-ceiling wood paneling and decorative plaster ceilings. Other bedrooms are finished more simply; the light moldings and trim in many

³William L. Price, "Details of Residence of Hon. Alan Wood, Jr., Woodmont, PA. -- William L. Price, Architect," *Architectural Review*, vol. III, no. 8 (December 1894), Plate XLVIII.

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 7

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

of these rooms suggests that they were redecorated in the 1930s. A significant alteration is the installation of decorative art tile thematic interiors in a number of the bathrooms; these are handsome examples of arts and craft tilework.

The top story is reached by stairways in different corners of the house, reflecting the discontinuous sequence of spaces determined by complex roof volumes. These rooms tend to be simply finished with plaster walls and wood trim but are enlivened by dormer windows and irregular ceilings. The corner turret contains a circular stair that connected the children's rooms with their nurses quarters, one of the few servants that lived in the main house.

Servant quarters were provided in the one-and-one-half story pendant building set between the manor house and the carriage house and stables to the east. The servants house is executed in the same materials and vocabulary of the main house with a tiled roof, paired wall dormers, and a heavily carved corbel course interspersed with shallow pointed arches. It is in essence a smaller, simplified version of the house and recalls Biltmore in the spatial and stylistic relationship between the main house and its neighboring service buildings.

Price also designed the neighboring carriage house and stable, which he aligned with the long horizontal axis of the facade. This is a boldly abstracted design, executed in large blocks of local stone and capped by a low roofline dominated by two powerful dormers. The use of a free, informal style is appropriate to the utilitarian function of the building, and in this Price departs from the model of Biltmore where the stables continue the formal stylistic vocabulary of the house. However, the link to Biltmore is maintained in the use of distinctive arched framing in the dormers which directly quotes Hunt's design of the shingled stable dormers in Asheville.

Also surviving on the site are the gateposts Price designed at the different entries to the site, the dairy barn -- one of the few remaining buildings from the Woodmont farm -- and a stone gatehouse at the south end of the site, 1201 Woodmont Road. This is a handsome small stone and brick Victorian Gothic cottage appears to predate Woodmont and may be the house the architect lived in on site during construction. It is possible that this building was already on the site when Wood purchased it, but it is historically integral to the history of the estate and has sufficient architectural merit to be considered a contributing building .

The picturesque grounds include formal, terraced gardens, wild gardens, a fresh water stream, several ponds, vegetable gardens, and orchards. Utilitarian farm and garden structures were important parts of the estate -- when built it featured a working farm with orchards and greenhouses. The foundations of some of these structures are located to the south of the carriage house, and a new greenhouse was recently constructed. Several features of the landscape were integral to the design and use of the house. These include the carriage drives and the broad lawn which were conceived to provide framed views of the house and grounds. Also significant is the

platform at the rear of the house behind the solarium, which provided a visual connection to the Wood iron works below.

The ensemble of manor house, secondary structures and landscape survive with an exceptional

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 8

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

degree of integrity.⁴ The exterior of the house is little changed from the views recorded in a photograph album dating to the 1890s. Most changes to the house occurred prior to 1935, and probably represent some alterations made by second owner, Richard G. Wood and his wife, followed by more extensive changes by the McNeals who acquired the house in 1929. These include the installation of windows in several of the original open porches, redecoration of the parlor and dining room, and changes in the finishes and decoration of bedrooms and bathrooms on the upper stories. Handsome bronze doors and gates were also added. The changes throughout the interior are of extremely high quality and were executed with great sensitivity to the original materials and style. Oddly, though they represent completely new finishes, the redesign of the parlor and dining room maintained the mood and stylistic motifs of the original designs. In the dining room, Price's Jacobean paneling was replaced by delicate Gothic paneling with shallow tracery. The work is of sufficient quality to suggest the hand of an architect of considerable refinement, possibly a local firm like Brockie and Hastings, tasteful eclecticists who did a number of projects for Wood family members in the 1910s and 1920s.⁵

Since 1952 the estate has been owned by Palace Mission, Inc., a branch of the International Peace Mission Movement, an important religious organization. Their work on the site has been largely restorative and includes the replacement of the main roof, which was done with tiles that closely match the originals. Some of the secondary buildings, including the carriage house/stable, have been renovated to serve as service buildings and as residences for custodians of the property, but their exterior character has been maintained. Landscape improvements have been made, and a few utilitarian structures have been erected, most of these are out of visual range of the core ensemble of manor house, servants quarters, carriage house, and lawn.

One feature however is significant. To the west of the manor house and directly on axis with his hexagonal office, is the *Shrine to Life*, where the body of Father Divine, the founder of the Peace Mission, is enshrined. Executed in an abstract modern classical vocabulary, the Shrine consists of a cylindrical granite room surmounted by a pyramidal roof, that relates to the religious and spiritual teachings of Father Divine and also echoes the great pyramidal volumes of the manor house. The shrine was erected between 1966 and 1970 according to designs drawn by William Heyl Thompson, a local architect. It is distinguished by a pair of great bronze doors, reminiscent

⁴The original construction of the house is unusually well-documented for a private house of the period. The drawings published by the architect in 1894 provide elevations of significant interior and exterior features, including the original dining room design. In addition, the current owner possesses a volume of professionally made photographs that document the house and grounds shortly after its completion. Much less is known about the alterations carried out by later owners. The current owner, who purchased the house from J. Hector McNeal's daughter, indicated that many of the changes to the house interior were done by the McNeals. The redecoration of the dining room is generally considered to be part of the work they undertook. The wood paneling is said to have been imported from a chapel in Avignon, France. If so, this which would coincide with the trend for importing medieval fragments for installation in grand American homes, the most well-known example being San Simeon, the California ranch built by William Randolph Hearst during the 1920s. Building permits confirm that the McNeals made numerous improvements to the house between 1930 and 1949, but none of these refer to work on interior finishes. This may be because permits were not yet required by the township for interior alterations to private houses. However, it also seems likely that at least some of the changes were made by Richard G. Wood, who lived in the house for twenty-eight years. *Ibid.*, plates XLVI-VI.

⁵Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1985), pp. 106-111.

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 9

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

of Ghiberti's Gates of Heaven of the Florence Baptistery, and two bronze angel sculptures on the interior, all designed by the well-known figurative sculptor, Donald De Lue.

Woodmont is an exceptional example of an industrialist's chateau style mansion and estate of the 1890s, one in which not only the house, but its associated structures, including servants quarters and carriage house, remain intact. It is further distinguished by the preservation of its original landscape, with a viewing platform which allowed its owner to watch over his iron plant across the river, in an unusual juxtaposition of the picturesque and the utilitarian. The site is also a significant landmark in religious and social history as the headquarters of the Peace Mission Movement, a socially progressive religious organization founded by Father Divine in the early twentieth century. It was through the effort of the Peace Mission that the site was preserved initially and their careful stewardship ensures its long-term preservation. In addition, Mother Divine and the Peace Mission open the house for public tours and feast days on a regular basis throughout the year. In this way, the house resembles the great country houses of Europe not only in its architectural precedents but in elements of its current use.

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 10

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES:

Note: Number in parentheses indicates location on surveyor's map, dated October 23, 1995.

Buildings:

1. Manor House (1)
2. Carriage house/Stable (2)
3. Servant Quarters (3)
4. Cottage (4)
5. Gate House (5)
6. Gate House (6)
7. Dairy Barn (7)

Structures:

1. Viewing platform (8)

Site:

1. Includes broad lawn, carriage drives, and formal gardens

NONCONTRIBUTING RESOURCES:

Note: Letter in parentheses indicates location on surveyor's map, dated October 23, 1995.

Buildings:

1. Bath house (A)
2. Bath house (B)

Structures:

1. *Shrine of Life* (D)
2. Swimming pool (C)
3. Boiler plant (E)
4. Greenhouse (F)

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 11

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: ___ Locally: ___

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A X B ___ C X D ___

Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A X B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G X

NHL Criteria: 1, 4

NHL Criteria Exception(s): 1, 8

NHL Theme(s): Expressing Cultural Values: Architecture

Creating Social Institutions and Movements: Religious Movements

Areas of Significance:

Architecture
Social History
Religion

Period(s) of Significance: 1892-1895, 1952

Significant Dates:

Manor house, servants quarters, carriage house, gatehouses construction:
1892-1895; Purchase of property by Father Divine for the Peace Mission
Movement headquarters: 1952

Significant Person(s):

Divine, Rev., M. J.

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Price, William Lightfoot, architect (1861-1916)

Historic Contexts:

XVI. Architecture
M. Period Revivals
7. Renaissance--French

XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements
J. Poverty Relief and Urban Social Reform
M. Civil Rights Movements

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 12

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

William L. Price's Woodmont is one of the finest and best-preserved chateau-style houses of 1890s America. Built for Alan Wood, Jr., one of the founders of the Alan Wood Iron and Steel Company, it is a monument to the architectural aspirations of the nation's industrial elite at the height of their power and wealth. It is, in the tradition of the palatial country estate by an industrial magnate in post-Civil War America, of the type established by Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, the Vanderbilt family, and others. But unlike the great estates of the Vanderbilts, Woodmont places its owner in relation to the source of his income by its siting overlooking his mill. It also represents a synthesis of European models with the commitment to craft and execution which came to full fruition as part of the American Arts and Crafts movement at the turn of the century. The architect, William L. Price, later became one of the chief American apostles of this movement, and this house demonstrates how those values could be adapted to the design of a mansion for a Quaker industrialist. The estate also possesses significance as the headquarters of the Peace Mission movement of Father and Mother Divine, who acquired the site in 1952. An African-American charismatic preacher, the Rev. M. J. Divine became widely known in the 1930s as the leader of a progressive religious and social movement that embraced integration long before the national Civil Rights movement.

Alan Wood, Jr. (1834-1902), industrialist, engineer, and United States Congressman, was a member of a Philadelphia-based Quaker family who amassed a fortune in iron manufacture during the nineteenth century.⁶ His firm, the Alan Wood Company, was one of a number of important iron-making operations that the family controlled in eastern Pennsylvania, and was one of the few successful family-owned steel companies in the nation to survive into the 1970s.⁷ The rise of the Wood family iron mills traces the pattern of development of the national iron and steel industry from small-scale, family-run operations of the early nineteenth century to the great corporate combines that emerged at the end of the century. Woodmont is a testament to the financial and social power of the family, and is remarkable for surviving as a nearly complete ensemble including servants quarters, carriage house, and the original landscaping, which included an extraordinary viewing platform from which its owner could observe the workings of his mills below.

The Wood family iron business was begun by Alan Wood, Jr.'s grandfather, James Wood (1771-1851), the grandson of a Dublin Quaker immigrant who had settled in Gynnedd, Pennsylvania in 1725. James Wood established a smithy in 1792 and operated several forges before opening a

⁶Biographical information on the Wood family is drawn from the *History of the Alan Wood Iron and Steel Company, 1792 - 1920* (Philadelphia: privately printed, 1920). A short biography of Alan Wood, Jr. appears on page 22. Biographical sketches also appeared in *The Manufactories and Manufacturers of Pennsylvania of the 19th Century* (Philadelphia: Galaxy Publishing Co, 1875), p. 155, and Lewis R. Hamersly, ed., *Who's Who in Pennsylvania* (New York: L. R. Hamersly Co., 1904), pp. 808-809.

⁷E. Digby Batzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (Illinois: The Free Press, 1958), pp. 196-197.

rolling mill on leased land at Wooddale, Delaware, in 1826.⁸ The Delaware Iron Works opened as a partnership between James and his eldest son Alan (1800-1881), who lived on the site and had charge of the mill while his father ran the retail outlet in Philadelphia. The basic pattern of business established at the Delaware mill -- with a family member living on site to direct operations -- remained a central feature of their management practice well into the twentieth century.

The success of the Delaware operation and receipt of another patent in 1831 allowed the Woods to purchase land in Conshohocken where they opened a water mill for rolling iron the following year. At the same time James bought a farm and relocated to Conshohocken. From this point forward the business expanded rapidly, pushed by regular innovations in production processes.⁹ The development of a process to manufacture sheet iron in 1841 was particularly lucrative, enabling Alan to purchase the Delaware Iron Works while four of his younger brothers took over the Conshohocken plant. The Conshohocken firm was renamed J. Wood & Bros. and operated as an independent company until 1917 when it was incorporated into the Alan Wood Iron and Steel Company. Although J. Wood & Bros. functioned as a separate company on paper, it and other family-held operations maintained close ties by serving as training grounds for successive generations of Wood sons and fulfilling complementary functions. This pattern of separately-held but cooperatively-run enterprises no doubt made possible their survival during the great consolidation of the iron and steel industry later in the century.

With the purchase of the Delaware mill, Alan Sr. now followed in his father's footsteps by placing his eldest son W. Dewees in charge of the mill while he managed the retail business in Philadelphia. When Dewees moved to western Pennsylvania in 1851 to build the McKeesport Iron Works, a younger brother, Alan, Jr., was put in charge. Although he was only seventeen, his education at the Philadelphia Central Institute under the preceptorship of Dr. A. L. Kennedy¹⁰ had prepared him for the job and he successfully managed the operation until the financial panic of 1857 brought Dewees temporarily back to Delaware. That same year, Alan Wood, Sr. established the firm of Alan Wood & Co. and started construction of the Schuylkill Iron Works, adjacent to the J. Wood & Bros. plant in Conshohocken.

The location of the Schuylkill Iron Works consolidated the family's holdings and its investment in Conshohocken. Family residences were built in close proximity to the plants, and the Woods

⁸The Woods were early innovators in the manufacture of rolled iron and steel. The establishment of the rolling mill came within a year of James receiving a patent for improvements in the manufacture of shovels and spades in which the blades were made of a single piece of rolled steel. *History of the Alan Wood Iron and Steel Company*, pp. 8-13.

⁹In addition to the patents awarded to James Wood in 1825 and 1831, the operation received patents in 1842 and 1851 (James Wood and William W. Wood), 1878 (Alan Wood & Co.), 1897 (Alan Wood Iron and Steel Co.), 1905 (Alan Wood, 3rd and Harry Lewis), and 1910 (Alan Wood, 3rd). *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁰Alfred L. Kennedy (1819 - 1896), a chemist, had trained as a physician in Leipzig and Paris. He was the principal organizer of the Polytechnic College in Philadelphia, chartered in 1853, and was noted for "having visited the best mining and polytechnic institutions of continental Europe." Jeffrey A. Cohen, "Building A Discipline: Early Institutional Settings for Architectural Education in Philadelphia, 1804 - 1890," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 53, no. 2 (June 1994), pp. 171-177.

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 14

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

played a significant role in town development.¹¹ Alan Jr. moved there as well, in order to help his father build the new mill and assume management of its operations. In this capacity he remained for nearly three decades, taking a hiatus to serve one term in Congress, 1874-1876, at the time of the United States Centennial. Like his father, Alan, Jr. directly supervised all mill activity from the development of new technological processes to the design and construction of the mills themselves.¹² He also maintained the family tradition of civic involvement, playing a prominent role in the erection of the Conshohocken Water Works in 1872, and establishing the First National Bank of Conshohocken the following year. With the incorporation of the company in 1885, Alan Jr. was elected treasurer and a younger brother, Howard, took charge of the operation.

Alan retired from active management of the firm in 1888 and spent the next few years traveling.¹³ By the early 1890s he had acquired three large properties on a high bluff overlooking Schuylkill River and determined to build a new country house. In this he was following the recent fashion of local society for large country houses in picturesque suburban settings.¹⁴ However, unlike his contemporaries whose suburban estates removed them from their business affairs, Wood chose a site directly above the family's expanding industrial complex.

For his architect, Wood selected William Lightfoot Price (1861-1916), whose Quaker upbringing and considerable experience in suburban home-development made him a logical choice.¹⁵ Price spent the winter of 1892 preparing plans and by February was far enough along to announce them in the city's principal real estate journal, the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide*.¹⁶ Construction began that spring and continued throughout the next two years.

Another qualification of Price's had impressed Wood; the architect had detailed personal knowledge of the building that was to be Woodmont's model: Biltmore, the George W. Vanderbilt house in Asheville, North Carolina. Under construction since 1889, Biltmore had

¹¹Patriarch James Wood headed the committee which applied for borough status in 1848 and "Squire" John Wood, Alan Wood Sr.'s younger brother, was for many years burgess and president of the borough council. *Montgomery County: The Second Hundred Years* (Pennsylvania: Montgomery County Federation of Historical Societies, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 129-130.

¹²An account of the development of the mill under Alan Wood, Jr. is provided in *The History of the Alan Wood Iron and Steel Company 1792 - 1920* (Privately printed), pp. 25-31.

¹³Lewis R. Hamersly, *Who's Who in Pennsylvania* (New York: L. R. Hamersly Co., 1904), pp. 808-809.

¹⁴A portfolio of photographs entitled *Philadelphia Suburban Houses* was published by the photographers Wells and Coates at this time, indicating the popularity of these modern country seats. Collection of the Free Library of Philadelphia, n.d.

¹⁵F. W. and W. L. Price are cited as the architects for the project in George E. Thomas, "William L. Price (1861-1916): Builder of Men and Buildings," (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1975), p. 93, and in Tatman and Moss, p. 629. Although still nominally associated with his brother Frank, by 1892 William was handling many commissions on his own. That William designed this project is suggested by his publication of the drawings under his own name in 1894.

¹⁶George Thomas cites an announcement in late February 1892 in the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, in "William L. Price (1861-1916): Builder of Men and Buildings," p. 93.

WOODMONT**Page 15**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

already attracted considerable attention as America's most expensive private house, and as an unusual example of the Loire Valley chateau translated into the a private house in the United States. Price came to know the house in 1890 while in Asheville, where he built a resort inn called the Kenilworth. This inn was a speculative building project, financed by members of the Strawbridges and Clothiers, of the Philadelphia retailing fortune, and by George Vanderbilt himself.¹⁷ While in Asheville, Price surely had access to his client's house, which was under construction, as well as to its plans and drawings.

The Kenilworth Inn was Price's first essay in developing a large composition in the new chateau style. The Inn was a massive structure composed of three long wings, each over two hundred feet long, with four main stories, a basement, and a multi-story roof. For inspiration the architect drew on styles of French chateau architecture whose robust rooflines must have seemed appropriate to the mountains of North Carolina. In addition, the architecture of the rising Biltmore House established a model for the development of the area. With its high French roofs, conical towers and other picturesque forms, Kennilworth helped to establish the chateau style as a staple for later large resort hotels, of which Bruce Price's Chateau Frontenac in Quebec is the best-known example.¹⁸

From Biltmore, Price derived the general character of the Loire Valley chateau that he used for the conception and many of the details at Woodmont. The plan of the house as an extended, richly animated silhouette and the emphasis on the linearity of the facade, designed to be viewed across a great lawn, clearly derive from the model of Biltmore, as does the incorporation of secondary buildings into the design scheme of the facade. Nonetheless, he did not simply copy the forms of Biltmore, but created an inspired synthesis, drawing on local vernacular practice. Working with local stone and in the smaller scale characteristic of Philadelphia, Price shaped a much more private and reticent building -- one which has more of the qualities of Price's Utopian communities than it does of the formal public character of Vanderbilt's Biltmore. Woodmont also displays a degree of whimsy and humor not present at Biltmore. Price had worked in the office of Philadelphia architect Frank Furness, from whom he inherited a sense of architectural play. This is most conspicuous in the fireplace, the centerpiece of the Great Hall, with its lighthearted motto and heraldic figures.

Rough construction on Woodmont continued through 1892, but the ornamental details of the exterior and interior were not undertaken until 1893, when William moved with his family to a cottage on the site to allow him to supervise the execution of these important elements.¹⁹ The final carving and decoration were not completed until 1894, and it was at the end of that year that

Price published a portfolio of drawings of the house in the prestigious *Architectural Review*, concentrating on its ornamental and sculptural details.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 84.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 84-88.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 95.

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 16

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Alan Wood Jr. spent the remaining years of his life in the house, selling it to his nephew, Richard G. Wood, a year before his death. Richard (1849-1931), son of Alan's brother Dewees, had managed his father's iron operations in western Pennsylvania from 1868 until 1901, when the business was absorbed by the United States Steel Corporation. Shortly afterward, Richard moved to Philadelphia where he assisted in organizing the Alan Wood Iron & Steel Co., which was incorporated in 1901.²⁰ With his assumption of significant responsibilities at the Conshohocken plant, Richard also took up residence at Woodmont, thereby continuing the long-standing family tradition of living near its industrial sites. Richard remained at Woodmont until shortly before his death in 1931. During that time he consolidated the family holdings and constructed a major new plant at nearby Ivy Rock, ultimately establishing Alan Wood Iron & Steel Co. as one of the giants of the United States steel industry.²¹

In 1929, Richard began to sell off his holdings in Gladwyne.²² A cousin purchased 40 acres along with one of the houses on the site. The farm was dismantled and a major auction took place at which the cattle and all the farm implements were sold. That lot of over 200 acres was purchased by the Philadelphia Golf Club for a suburban golf course which still occupies the site. And Woodmont itself was sold to a prominent corporation lawyer, J. Hector McNeal.

In 1952, Woodmont was sold to the Palace Mission, Inc., one of the churches organized under the International Peace Mission Movement. I became the country estate of the Rev. M. J. Divine and his wife, who are better known as Father and Mother Divine, and was dedicated in September of the following year as The Mount of the House of the Lord. It possesses additional significance as the headquarters of their organization, the Peace Mission movement, and as the site of Father Divine's shrine. Father Divine first came to prominence in the early part of the century as an itinerant preacher in the south. By 1919 he established his first mission in Sayville, Long Island, where he offered food, shelter, clothing, and employment to the needy. As the number of his followers swelled, he became a controversial figure, especially because his flock was racially integrated. After a law suit was filed against him by neighbors, Divine relocated to Harlem in 1933. During the next decade, he developed an enormous following through his preaching, and, more significantly through innovative programs that fed and employed an enormous number of people during the Depression.²³

²⁰*National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White, 1941), pp. 136-137. Also, Frank H. Taylor, *History of the Alan Wood Iron and Steel Company, 1792-1920* (privately printed), p. 47.

²¹John N. Ingham, *The Iron Barons: A Social Analysis of an American Urban Elite, 1874-1965*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), p. xviii.

²²An account of the sale of the estate is provided in Richard G. Wood III's "Remembrances of Woodmont," an unpublished manuscript, dated December 15, 1989.

²³There are many conflicting reports on the size of Father Divine's following in these years. He was a nationally known figure during the 1930s and numerous articles were written about him, including a famous three-part series by St. Clair McKelway and A. J. Leibling that appeared in the *New Yorker* in June of 1936. Estimates of his following during the period ran as high as two million but none of these sources are considered reliable. The first contemporary scholar to seriously consider the contributions of Father Divine and the Peace Mission movement is Robert Weisbrot whose 1983 biography concludes that he had a national impact as a reform leader. Robert Weisbrot, *Father Divine and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983) p. 189.

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 17

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

In the early 1940s, the churches founded by Father Divine were formally incorporated under the Peace Mission Movement, and during the Second World War its headquarters was moved from New York to Philadelphia. The members of the mission live communally and follow a strict code of celibacy. Father Divine's missions are distinguished for having embraced policies of racial and class integration long before the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. He also developed significant social programs that are credited as having greater success in lifting followers from poverty and in breaking down color lines, than any other religious leader of the period.²⁴

The site now includes a shrine to Father Divine, erected between 1966 and 1970. It is richly constructed of white, red, and black granite with interior sculpture and a pair of massive sculpted bronze doors by the nationally-known sculptor Donald De Lue (1897-1988). De Lue is best known for patriotic and commemorative works, often on a monumental scale. The bronze doors allowed De Lue to explore his deeply held beliefs in patriotism and spirituality through the ichnographic program he developed to express the teachings of Father Divine.²⁵

Woodmont is the most important house designed by Quaker architect, William Price, the architectural theorist, social reformer and pioneer of reinforced concrete construction.²⁶ He is celebrated as the designer of America's first great reinforced concrete hotels, the Blenheim (1905) and the Traymore (1906-12) in Atlantic City, and as the founder of Rose Valley (1901), the Utopian Arts & Crafts commune near Philadelphia. Price was one of the leading architects at the turn of the century, including Frank Lloyd Wright, Greene & Greene, and Gustav Stickley, who sought to reconcile architectural tradition with novel construction and planning. He is the most important East Coast architect of this movement, and his work has national importance.

Although Price later overcame his traditional training, he was rooted in Philadelphia's extremely conservative architectural culture and its Quaker heritage. He trained with the Quaker architect Addison Hutton and also worked in the office of Frank Furness. During the mid-1880s Price established a partnership with his brother Frank (also a veteran of the Furness office) and developed a practice designing picturesque commuter suburbs. The town of Wayne, Pennsylvania, was largely shaped by the young firm, and the rich variety of house designs established their reputation. These houses were in the Victorian mode of Furness, with their lively sense of animated volume, but they were already enlivened by Price's growing interest in materials and textures, the hallmark of his later Arts and Crafts work.

²⁴Ibid., p. 189.

²⁵DeLue's other local commissions are the carved panels of Justice and Law on the Federal Courthouse and Post Office building at 9th and Market Streets (1934-40) in Philadelphia. Obituary, "Donald Harcourt De Lue, 90, A Patriotic Sculptor," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 29, 1988, and D. Roger Howlett, *The Sculpture of Donald De Lue: Gods, Prophets and Heroes* (Boston: D. R. Godine, 1990), pp. 159-165.

²⁶William Price was the subject of a dissertation by George E. Thomas, "William L. Price (1861-1916): Builder of Men and Buildings," (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1975). Further bibliographic information includes: Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930*, Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1985, pp. 629-633; Adolf K. Plazcek, *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* (New York: The Free Press, 1982); George E. Thomas, "William L. Price, AIA," *Drawing Toward Building: Philadelphia Architectural Graphics, 1732 - 1986* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), pp. 169-172 and Philadelphia Museum of Art, *Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art*, (Philadelphia: 1976).

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 18

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

During these years Price published a series of small books on domestic architecture, one of which was noted in the influential *Nation* magazine, and he began to think of the house not only as a problem of design, but of community. The special quality of his later work is based on the strong interest in the social role of architecture. In later years he became interested in Utopian communities, and was influenced by the economist Henry George (1839-1897), whose notion of single-tax society was realized by Price in his community at Arden, Delaware. His final work was the progressive Chicago Freight Terminal (1914-19) which, like his hotels, has vanished.

Woodmont is one of the country's great examples of the so-called *chateau style*, which reproduce the forms of the French chateaux of the Loire Valley in the years around 1500, with their vigorous synthesis of late Gothic and early Renaissance forms. The style was introduced by Richard Morris Hunt in his Vanderbilt houses, particularly George W. Vanderbilt's Biltmore in Asheville, North Carolina. The Loire Valley chateau played a critical role in the history of American domestic architecture. It provided a way of striking a balance midway between medieval picturesqueness and classical discipline and repose, and was a major event in the general turn from Victorian excess and exuberance during the 1880s and 1890s.

Price's design is distinguished both by its powerfully pyramidal composition and by its highly pictorial composition as an animated silhouette. Price subordinated all the meandering elements of his sprawling composition to the all-dominant central block over the Great Hall, which is both the principal form of the exterior and the central volume of the interior. At the same time, he arranged the components of the house parallel to the ridge, maximizing the length and the silhouette of the building. Here he expressed most closely the pictorial values of the new style. The principal view, the southern facade, was treated as an extended frontispiece, just as Biltmore was, and the landscaping of the entire estate was configured to serve this view, which would be revealed, across a broad open lawn, to the passenger arriving in the carriage drive. This landscaping was based on French prototypes and also the example of Biltmore. It is an important early example of Biltmore becoming a national model, both in style and in planning.

But Woodmont is not just an exercise in following prototypes. It is a very sophisticated piece of architectural design, not merely a pattern book design, but an original synthesis of European prototypes and American traditions. It demonstrates a simultaneous use of high style models with the same attention to detail and craft characteristic of American Arts and Crafts design, of which Price was one of the leaders. The planning of the interior demonstrates the new ideals of 1890s domestic theory. Instead of the flowing halls and continuous spatial sequences of 1880s design, Woodmont presents the new doctrine of the Great Hall, a combination of medieval banquet hall and manorial hall, evoking a romantic picture of medieval domesticity, gathered about a great hearth under a vast timbered roof. This was a powerful image of domestic intimacy, rendered on a grand scale, and shows how Price's Utopian notions of community might be adapted to the family life of a Quaker plutocrat.

Woodmont is also a precious document of labor history and landscape planning, and is one of the most striking examples of the siting of factory owner housing in America. The Wood family established a iron manufacturing dynasty that spanned nearly 200 years; their factory at Conshohocken has been demolished, but Woodmont documents their long relationship to the site. From its location atop the ridge on the west side of the Schuylkill River, Wood was

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 19

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

simultaneously above, upwind, and across the river from his sprawling factories, while they were laid out visibly to him. The natural landscaping to the north of the house screened it from the industrial landscape of Conshocken across the river, but a viewing platform erected on a slight promontory made it possible to observe the workings of Wood's mills at a glance. Woodmont is a unique example of an American capitalist exploiting an odd landscape opportunity to place a Loire Valley chateau in direct and meaningful juxtaposition to a gritty industrial complex. Few of these great factory owners houses survive in such a scrupulous state of preservation and virtually none with their landscape setting intact.

Finally, Woodmont is significant as the home of the Peace Mission movement, founded by the Rev. Major J. Divine, also known as Father Divine, who made it his home and the center of the movement during the 1950s and 1960s. It is a monument of the American Civil Rights movement. It is fitting that the much persecuted Peace Mission Movement came to Pennsylvania because of its tradition of Quaker tolerance, coming to rest in a home by a Quaker architect for a Quaker client.

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WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # _____
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository): Archives of the Peace Mission Movement, located at Woodmont.

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 24

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 65.847

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	18	474520	4435155
B	18	475190	4435370
C	18	475320	4435080
D	18	474830	4434830
E	18	474570	4434930

Verbal Boundary Description:

Description of the consolidated parcel combining tax map parcel 14-FG-1 known as 1622 Spring Mill Road with tax map parcel 12, 13-FG-32 known as 1201 Woodmont Road containing all the improvements thereon situate in the Township of Lower Merion, the County of Montgomery and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania according to a plan titled "Land Development Plan of Woodmont, Palace Mission, Inc." prepared for Woodmont, The Mount of the House of the Lord, Palace Mission, Inc. By Momenee and Associates, Inc. Consulting Civil Engineers and Land Surveyors dated October 23, 1995 last revised January 20, 1997 as follows to wit:

Beginning at a point in the line now or formerly of Andrew G. and Susan L. Gay being the eastern corner of said parcel and being a point on the southerly street line of Aloha Lane (50.00 feet wide) measured along said streetline S 60-36-00 W 229.11 feet from the centerline of Bryn Tyddyn Drive; thence from said beginning point along the lands of various owners crossing the end of Ginkgo Lane S 60-36-00 W 1678.08 feet crossing a concrete monument marking the eastern streetline of Woodmont Road to a point in the bed of Woodmont Road; thence continuing in the bed of said road the following nine courses and distances: 1) N 29-47-00 W 7.9 feet to a point; 2) thence N 31-52-00 W 354.70 feet to a point; 3) thence N 58-01-00 W 177.20 feet to a point; 4) thence N 74-40-00 W 215.42 feet to a point; 5) thence N 86-41-00 W 92.65 feet to a point; 6) thence S 69-07-00 W 150.40 feet to a point; 7) thence N 79-13-00 W 59.45 feet to a point; 8) thence N 35-07-00 W 150.40 feet to a point; 8) thence N 35-07-00 W 65.50 feet to a point; 9) thence N 17-28-48 E 62.09 feet to a point in line of lands now or formerly of Daniel R. Fascione; thence leaving the bed of Woodmont Road crossing the easterly streetline of said road along lands of Fascione S 72-16-00 E 83.09 feet to a point; thence along the same N 47-20-00 E 124.29 feet to a point; thence along the same N 30-03-00 E 141.10 feet to a point; thence still along the same N 74-05-00 W crossing over the easterly streetline of Woodmont Road 181.49 feet to a point in the bed of Woodmont Road; thence along the bed of Woodmont Road the five following courses and distances: 1) N 14-13-00 W 78.21 feet to a point; 2) thence N 23-31-00 W 131.05 feet to a point; 3) thence N 34-13-00 W 80.82 feet to a point; 4) thence N 49-31-00 W 58.67 feet to a point; 5) thence N 73-12-00 W 118.53 feet to a point; thence leaving the bed of Woodmont Road crossing the northeasterly streetline N 11-44-13 W 157.88 feet to a point on the southerly right-of-way of Interstate 76 the Schuylkill Expressway; thence along the same N 75-35-21 E 787.78 feet to a point of curvature; thence along the arc of a circle curving to the left having a radius of 5789.65 feet and an arc distance of 633.23 feet to a point of tangency; thence N 69-21-34 E 952.95 feet to a point marked by a concrete monument; thence leaving the

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 25

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

right-of-way of Interstate 76 along the lands now or formerly of Charles V. Sioelker, III and Wendy S. Kerns and along the lands now or formerly of Harriet B. Kravitz S 25-45-58 E 959.34 feet to a point; thence S 60-36-00 W along the lands now or formerly of Joseph L. And Sally W. Castle 66.61 feet to a point; thence N 29-24-00 W along the lands now or formerly of Joseph K. Jr. and Hernice W. Seidle 89.50 feet to a point; thence S 60-36-00 W 161.99 feet to a point; thence S 27-01-00 E 237.01 feet to the first mentioned point and place of beginning.

Boundary Justification:

Encompasses the boundaries of the property as described in the 1997 revision of the 1995 survey by Momenee and Associates and includes the buildings of the complexes and land that have historically been part of Woodmont and that have integrity.

WOODMONT

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 26

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS SURVEY
June 30, 1998