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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.



### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Oaks Cloister  
Other names/site number: NA  
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

### 2. Location

Street & number: 5829 Wissahickon Avenue and 3 Lehman Lane  
City or town: Philadelphia State: PA County: Philadelphia  
Not for Publication: NA Vicinity: NA

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

	<u>2/26/2019</u>
Signature of certifying official:	Date
<u>Deputy SHPO/Pennsylvania Historical &amp; Museum Commission</u>	
Title/State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

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

Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title/State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

### 4. 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) \_\_\_\_\_

	<u>4/22/19</u>
Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

Private:

Public – Local

Public – State

Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

Building(s)

District

Site

Structure

Object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

DOMESTIC – Single Dwelling

COMMERCE/TRADE – Professional

**Current Functions**

DOMESTIC – Multiple Dwelling

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## 7. Description

### **Architectural Classification**

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS – Colonial Revival,  
Tudor Revival, Renaissance Revival, Neoclassical – and LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS – Bungalow/Craftsman

### **Materials:**

Principal exterior materials of the property: Stone

## **Narrative Description**

### ***Introduction***

The Oaks Cloister is a residential property located at 5829 Wissahickon Avenue in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia, PA. The property consists of a building complex – the primary residence (with additions) and a second building, which formerly served as a studio and the stable/carriage house – that sits back from the street, secluded in the middle of the block. The property is accessed by a narrow private street known as Lehman Lane, which curves through the center of the block to connect Wissahickon Avenue and Price Street.<sup>1</sup> Ornamented stone and cement walls line the private street, and formal landscaping surrounds the building complex. The property was developed by architect Joseph Huston. He designed the main house for his family's residence in 1900, then soon-after undertook a substantial remodeling and expansion effort in 1902-1903. He continued to expand the house into the late 1920s.<sup>2</sup> The 3-story main house has an adjoining 3-story tower (1903) and 1-story garage to the north(1927) and a 3-story studio and carriage house (combined; 1903) to the east, visually connected to the main house by an enclosed, 1-story cloister. The cloister was enclosed c.1920 and is connected to the tower addition of the main house. The buildings are all clad in Wissahickon schist and the overall design was influenced by the Tudor Revival, Renaissance Revival, Colonial Revival, Craftsman and Neoclassical styles. The main house with its additions is counted as one contributing resource, and the studio is a separate contributing resource. The interiors contain original materials, objects, and features designed by prominent artists and craftspeople who were Huston's contemporaries. The entire designed property, including the landscape, lane, and walls, is counted as a contributing site. Other than changes related primarily to kitchen remodeling, the building complex is largely intact, and the property overall retains all aspects of integrity.

<sup>1</sup> Lehman Lane is a private street that officially belongs to the Oaks Cloister property. Other, adjacent properties that back on to the lane have access to it via easements, some with openings in the stone walls to connect their back or side yards to the lane.

<sup>2</sup> Originally, the facade was much more restrained and included an open front porch with a balcony above and overhanging eaves with exposed rafters (Figure 3).

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### *Setting*

The houses immediately surrounding the property primarily consist of single-family detached and twin middle-class homes from roughly the same period, and are stately Late Victorian or Revival styles, but are not as dramatic as the design of the Oaks Cloister. The south end of Fairmount Park (NR 1972) is across from the property's entrance, on the west side of Wissahickon Avenue, and the Alden Park Apartments (1925, NR 1980) are located southeast of the property. Rittenhouse Town (1690, NR 1992) is located less than a mile to the northwest, within the Fairmount Park boundary, and the Germantown Historic District (NR 1966) is located about five blocks to the northeast.

Oaks Cloister is not readily visible from the street due to its placement deep within the block, but it is connected visually by a stone wall that wraps along much of Wissahickon Avenue and Price Street and lines the rear property lines of adjacent homes along Lehman Lane (Photographs #9 and 10). A few other homes on the block are also set "inside" the block, behind other homes; they are also accessed from Lehman Lane. The stone wall follows the outer edges of Lehman Lane, providing arched openings with gates to the sidewalks of adjacent homes. The inner side of Lehman Lane, distinguishing the Oaks Cloister property from neighboring properties, is lined with a cement wall with an open balustrade and periodically marked with cement urns. The main drive's paving is primarily of contemporary asphalt with older concrete edging, but the ends of Lehman Lane nearest Wissahickon Avenue and Price Street are brick.

Because Oaks Cloister's relationship to Lehman Lane and the adjacent residential properties is such an important aspect of the property's overall design and siting, the private street and the stone walls are included within the nominated boundary and are considered to be important landscape features. At the Wissahickon end of Lehman Lane, the stone wall extends to create an arched pedestrian access to the lane. The arch and pillars at the ends of the walls are within the nominated boundary and are part of the contributing site. Within the sidewalk along Wissahickon Avenue, in front of the arch, is a Pennsylvania State Marker recognizing the accomplishments of Joseph Huston. The Marker, dedicated in 2005, is not within the boundary and is not a contributing resource.

The property slopes down creating an exposed basement level in the northern portion of the house. Adjacent to the primary elevation is a formal planted garden with a bricked paved driveway with a landscaped island at the north end that provides access between Lehman Lane and the garage (Photographs #1 and 3). At the Wissahickon Avenue side are two Corinthian stone columns, off of which is a stepped, balustraded cement wall with stone urns that encircles the house complex. A second planted area is at the southeast corner of the site. It is less formally landscaped but has boxwood hedges, mature trees and open grass, along with paved walkways adjacent to the building. A second, partially bricked driveway accesses the ground level of the studio at the rear of the complex (the studio building contains a stable at the ground level) (Photograph #5). Along the rear driveway to the stable entrance is a stone wall topped by a painted iron fence.

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### ***Exterior***

The main house, tower, studio and cloister are all clad in Wissahickon schist and their design was heavily influenced by the Tudor Revival style with Craftsman style detailing. They exhibit an almost-whimsical, somewhat random aesthetic with asymmetrical facades, irregular building footprints and a wide range of window configurations. As such, the building complex may present as a somewhat rambling compound that was continuously modified when, in reality, it was a deliberate attempt achieved through two primary campaigns to reference the historic manor houses of northern Europe.

The main house was originally designed by and built for Joseph Huston in 1900 for his family's home, but was substantially remodeled (also at Huston's direction) in 1902-1903 (Photographs #1, 9 and 10).<sup>3</sup> The L-shaped building has a steep gable roof with slate shingles and shallow dormers throughout. The primary elevation is dominated by three centered, overhanging Tudor gables along the roofline. The prominent side elevation is also dominated by a projecting Tudor-style gable (Photographs #7 and 9), and other elevations have large, flush Tudor-style gables as well (Photograph #10). Stone plaques containing the date of the original house, 1900, are found on exterior walls and the stone walls lining the private drive.

The fenestration pattern on the building is somewhat irregular, both in terms of placement and configuration. On the primary elevation, the first and third bays from the southern end contain multi-light wood windows with multi-light wood transoms on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors, which are separated by a half-timbered, Tudor style spandrel. Behind the window openings are enclosed porches (Photograph #1). The second bay contains a multi-light, multi-panel, single-leaf wood door with multi-light, multi-panel wood sidelights and a multi-light wood transom (Photograph #2). The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor window matches those of the adjacent bays and there is also a matching spandrel. On the side drive-facing elevation, the westernmost bay contains multi-light wood windows and spandrel on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors to match those on the primary elevation (Photograph #10). On the remainder of the elevation, as well as on the others, the openings contain a somewhat random combination of 3-light windows with leaded and stained glass, multi-light, double-hung windows with exterior storm windows and shallow, 6-light bay windows (Photographs #7, 9 and 10). In certain locations, the 3-light and bay windows contain leaded glass patterning. On the rear elevation, the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor bay window contains two stained glass coats of arms, one for the Huston family and one for the family of his wife, Mathilde, the MacGregors, which was her maiden name (Photograph #16).

A 3-story tower addition dates to the 1902-1903 expansion of the house (Photographs #1, 3 and 4). It is approximately the same height as the main house. Like the main house, it is clad in Wissahickon schist. On the 1<sup>st</sup> floor is a projecting, crenellated vestibule with a wood door with a Gothic arched head, bas-relief face and flanking engaged Corinthian columns. The openings

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<sup>3</sup> Originally, the facade was much more restrained and included an open front porch with a balcony above and overhanging eaves with exposed rafters (Figure 3).

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above contain a 3-sided wood bay window on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and paired multi-light wood windows on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. A 1-story garage was added to the tower in 1927 (Photograph #4). It is clad in Wissahickon schist with a shed roof, overhanging slate eave, paneled wood garage door and wood door surround.

Behind the main house is a 2- and 3-story architectural office and studio, which dates to 1902-1903 (Photographs #5 and 6). It is also clad in Wissahickon schist and has a flat roof and a crenellated roofline. Like the main house, the building has a wide range of window openings, in both configuration and placement. These range from single and paired multi-light wood windows of varying sizes to paired wood windows with leaded glass and Gothic arched heads and single-light windows. In the rear, lower level of the building is an exposed basement with a double-leaf, multi-light wood door to access the interior stable. The primary entrance to the first floor living space faces the main house. It consists of double-leaf wood doors. The studio was originally designed to be used as a carriage house/stable on the lowest level and as Huston's architectural studio and offices above.

Between the main house and studio is an enclosed cloister that dates to c.1920 (Photographs #6-8). Prior to the enclosure, the cloister consisted of an open walkway surrounded by an alley of oak trees, hence the name Oaks Cloister. Once enclosed, the cloister housed Huston's art collection. The 1-story cloister is clad in Wissahickon schist and has a gable roof with asphalt shingles, which were placed over the original wood. There are various window and door openings on the side elevations, including paired stone arches, in reference to its name. The ends of the cloister join the tower and abut the studio. There is no internal connection to the studio building, but a single-leaf door provides access to the library of the tower section of the house.

***Interior***

In the main house, the interior of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor is accessed through the enclosed front porch, which has a stone floor and painted wood plank ceiling. The primary entrance consists of a wide, single-leaf, glazed wood door with wide, 1-light leaded glass sidelights and a 1-light leaded glass transom (Photograph #11). It accesses the centered foyer, which has wood floors, a wood beamed ceiling and wood paneled wainscoting with wall paper above (Photograph #12). Across from the entrance is a single-leaf, paneled wood door inset with bull's eye leaded glass leading to the kitchen area, and the primary staircase for the original portion of the house. All finishes in the entry hall are original except for the paint and wallpaper, which were inspired by original finishes. The kitchen was first remodeled in 1955 and again later in the early 2000s, with new cabinets, appliances, flooring and fixtures.<sup>4</sup>

To one side of the entry is a study, which documentary evidence shows was originally painted orange and black in allegiance to Huston's alma mater, Princeton University (Photograph

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<sup>4</sup> "Oaks Cloister" *Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form*, May 1995: 2.

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#14).<sup>5</sup> This room has a wood floor, plaster ceilings and moldings and wood wainscoting with wall paper above. Accessible from both the foyer and study is the formal dining room, which has an angled fireplace (Photograph #15). The room also has wood floors and plaster walls and ceilings with elaborate moldings, including a centered ceiling medallion, and leaded glass windows.

On the opposite side of the foyer is an extraordinarily ornate sitting room, with a large English oak and green tile fireplace in the center of one wall (Photograph #13). The oak overmantel, flanked by caryatids, depicts a 'Boar Hunt' and is a replica of a fireplace located in the dining room at the Mercersburg Academy.<sup>6</sup> The Boar Hunt panel was designed by noted American sculptor Alexander Stirling Calder.<sup>7</sup> The room also has a wood floor, painted plaster walls with moldings and a painted plaster ceiling with an ornamental strapwork fret, which is similar to the ceiling in the Governor's private office at the Pennsylvania Capitol, also designed by Huston. Double-leaf, carved and glazed wood doors with a multi-light carved wood transom and a multi-light carved wood surround are located on the end wall and provide access to the stairway that leads to the library, in the tower addition.

The stairway featured in the main entrance area (Photographs #12 and 16) is wide, with a U-return, wainscoting, wood treads and risers, wood balusters and railings and a bronze newel post at the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. It provides access between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors. At the landing between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors is a 3-sided upholstered window seat and four leaded glass windows with transoms, with an elaborate, original leather mural by Henry Busse above.<sup>8</sup> The secondary stairway, presumably used by the servants, is located in the kitchen area. This straight-run stairway has wood treads and risers. It provides access between the basement and 3<sup>rd</sup> floor.

Accessed by the entry hall's stairway, the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor has a master bedroom and two guest bedrooms, each of which have their own bathrooms (largely intact) and sitting rooms. There is also a deep, enclosed porch along the primary facade. The porch dates to the house's renovation and expansion period. All bedrooms are accessed from a centered hallway adjacent to the primary stairway. The master bedroom has a wood floor and painted plaster walls and ceiling (Photograph #17). (In general, all decorative paint finishes are contemporary but often inspired by the original finishes.) There is also an Italian Renaissance style fireplace in the the master suite. One bedroom (believed to have been the Hustons' son Craig's room) has wood floors, painted plaster walls and ceilings and painted wood paneling (Photograph #18). Its painted wood fireplace features Mercer tiles and bull's eye leaded glass. Under the mantel is a tile inscription reading, "Flee Winter Wait Summer." The other bedroom (believed to have been the Hustons' daughter Judelle's room) is part of the tower addition, and also has wood

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<sup>5</sup> "Oaks Cloister" 2.

<sup>6</sup> Mercersburg Academy is a boarding school in Mercersburg, PA. Huston completed the design of the dining hall there.

<sup>7</sup> "Oaks Cloister" 2. Calder was a friend of Huston's at Princeton.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Busse designed decorative leather work above the wainscoting in the Lieutenant Governor's Reception Room of the Capitol, although his leather murals for the same area were eliminated from final plans.

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floors, painted plaster walls and ceilings and painted wood paneling (Photograph #19). It has a painted wood fireplace with hand-painted Delft tiles, of which no two are identical. Flanking the elaborate over-mantel are two recessed windows containing bull's eye leaded glass.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> floor contains three bedrooms, one bathroom and a large living room at the south end (Photograph #20).<sup>9</sup> Because of the pitch of the roof, these rooms all have slanted ceilings and dormer windows. The living room has wood floors and painted plaster walls and ceilings. There is also an elaborate plaster fireplace at one end, which is flanked by caryatids. The bedroom-sitting area portion of the third floor was originally Huston's studio, prior to the house's expansion, and is where he designed his concepts for the Capitol. The other two bedrooms, which were originally servants' rooms, have less ornamentation with wood floors and plaster walls and ceilings.

The basement level of the original portion of the main house is primarily open in plan. Because most of this area has always been used for ancillary storage and service space, it has no notable features. The only exception—a notable exception—is the rathskeller along the primary elevation, which has a Mercer tile floor and fireplace at the south end (Photograph #23). The long, narrow room has a low, beamed ceiling supported by brackets, tall and substantial wood wainscoting with painted plaster above. It was used by Huston as a recreational gathering area. The rathskeller is accessible from the ground-level entrance of the tower added to the house during the 1902-03 expansion. (The tower's ground-level exterior entrance provides ready access to both the rathskeller and the library.)

In the tower, the basement level contains the library (Photograph #22), the 1<sup>st</sup> floor contains the top portion of the tower stairway (Photograph #21) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor contains the bedroom described above, with the delft blue tiles. In the basement level, the primary elevation contains an entrance to a small, angled foyer (Photograph #4) and a doorway to the rathskeller; adjacent to the foyer is a bathroom with a curved wall. The foyer opens into the library. The opposite end of the library contains a single-leaf door that access the enclosed Cloister (Photograph #22). On the side wall, there is access to the basement utility and service areas under the main house, thru which is a doorway to the rear yard and patio along the Cloister wall. On the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, there are double-leaf doors that provide access between the top of the tower stairway and the main house's sitting room (Photograph #13).

The ornate library is balanced by a dramatic, sweeping wood staircase at one end and a stone fireplace at the other end. The staircase has wood treads and risers, wood balusters and a wood railing. Marble lions flank the bottom of the staircase. Beneath the staircase are paneled bookcases, one of which revolves to reveal a walk-in vault. The tower's fireplace was built with stone from Caen and is a replica of the original located in the Cluny Museum in Paris.<sup>10</sup> It

<sup>9</sup> Originally, the bedroom adjacent the living room did not exist and it was one, large open space. Prior to the construction of the separate studio building, this larger area operated as Huston's studio. According to Huston's daughter, this is the room where Huston drafted his plans for the Capitol. "Oaks Cloister" 3.

<sup>10</sup> Reportedly, the original fireplace was made for King Francis I and first located in Rouen where Napoleon later

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has four gold leaf panels in the over-mantel which tell the story of the house of the Virgin Mary.<sup>11</sup> On the side wall is a glass tile and silver leaf niche that holds a statue of *Venus in the Waves*, by George Gray Barnard.<sup>12</sup> The remaining finishes in the room include wood floors, baseboard and chair rail, wall-papered walls, painted plaster moldings with literary inscriptions and an elaborate polychrome coffered, plaster ceiling. Suspended from the ceiling is a lotus blossom chandelier of Murano glass that is five feet in diameter.<sup>13</sup>

A narrow, glazed wood door adjacent the fireplace accesses the Cloister, which was enclosed to house Huston's art collection.<sup>14</sup> Originally an open allee of oak trees, the enclosed (c.1920) space features two rows of running stone arches with open areas on either side (Photographs #24 and 25). One side has a stone floor, painted wood wainscoting, plaster walls and a stained-glass ceiling. The center aisle also has a stone floor and individual painted plaster domes with suspended metal light fixtures between the arches. At the end is a statue of *Beatrice*, which is made of rose marble with white marble hands and face on a green onyx base. Inscribed on the statue is the name, "Professor Petrillo, Florence Academy of Fine Arts."<sup>15</sup> The other side has a stone floor, wood plank walls and a painted wood beam ceiling. In the center of the space is a stone fountain, which was previously in the adjacent garden.

The studio building is located to the rear of the cloister. The ground level of the studio contains a boiler room, tack area and a carriage house and horse stable. The tack area has beamed ceilings and is wainscoted with chestnut wood. The stable contains eight chestnut stalls decorated with wrought iron. One of the stalls still bears the nameplate of Joseph Huston's favorite Kentucky thoroughbred horse, "Jo Wheeler." Today the carriage house serves as a storage area. The 1<sup>st</sup> floor, which was Huston's main studio area, contains a double-height space with paneled wood walls, painted wood beamed wood ceiling and Mercer tile floors (Photographs #26 and 27). At the foot of the stairway from the main area to the offices is another tile mosaic by Mercer. Along the perimeter of the upper level is a hallway accessing former offices. Originally, these rooms served as offices for the architect and his draftsmen; they are now bedrooms and a bathroom. In the center of the opposite wall is a rusticated stone fireplace, which is inlaid with Mercer tiles and has a centered bas relief medallion of Samuel Huston, the architect's brother. The portrait medallion is made of either slip cast clay or cast cement painted to simulate bronze.<sup>16</sup> Even the windows were ornamented, including a leaded

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saw it and requested that it be brought to its current location, in Paris. "Oaks Cloister", 3.

<sup>11</sup> According to legend, the house was carried across the Adriatic Sea by angels who placed the abode in Loretto, Italy at the site where a cathedral dedicated to the Virgin now stands.

<sup>12</sup> Huston also commissioned Bernard to design sculptures for both the interior and exterior of the Pennsylvania Capitol. The glass and tile leaf process was also replicated in the Capitol's rotunda.

<sup>13</sup> Huston imported the chandelier from the island of Murano during a visit to Venice. "Oaks Cloister", 3.

<sup>14</sup> The *Assumption of St. Anne* attributed to the school of Murillo, was acquired by Huston and still hangs in the cloister.

<sup>15</sup> According to oral history, Huston saw this work at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, MO and purchased the piece for his cloister. "Oaks Cloister", 5.

<sup>16</sup> It may have been a model for a bronze casting as it bears the name of the Henry Bonnard Bronze Company, the firm also responsible for casting many of the bronze pieces in the Pennsylvania Capitol. "Oaks Cloister", 5.

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glass window with the Princeton University emblem, which was located near his drafting table, and two stained glass windows. The 1<sup>st</sup> floor also contains a kitchen, study, bathroom and laundry room. A cast iron spiral staircase in the Studio kitchen leads to the ground level.

### ***Integrity***

The Oaks Cloister retains integrity. There have only been three property owners since the time of construction. The site has been preserved, including the private lane, circulation plan, stone walls, and original balustraded cement wall with large urns surrounding the house. Although the kitchen has been fully remodeled, there have been no other significant changes to the property since Huston built the garage in 1927. As such, the overall form and the defining interior and exterior materials and characteristics remain, including the Tudor style half timbering, Wissahickon schist, varied window openings, ornate interiors and prominent fireplaces. In those locations where decorative interior elements have required repair, they were carefully restored when possible and materials replaced in kind when necessary, using either photographic documentation or scientific analysis, or both. (A substantial number of historic interior photos exist to corroborate interior finishes and support the integrity of the interior.)

The conversion of the studio into residential use began after Huston's death when in 1940 his widow Mathilde left the main house and converted the studio into a residence for her and their son, Craig. The volume of the studio's main two-story room remains intact, along with the upper-level open hallway that accesses the original individual offices (now bedrooms). The primary decorative finishes remain, along with the more programmatic elements, such as the horse stalls in the stable area below.

The quality, placement and condition of the construction materials as well as the style influences are highly characteristic of the period and also all remain wholly intact. The placement and setting of the building remain intact since the initial construction, with no substantial changes to the property or, in general, to the surrounding residential neighborhood. The siting of the building complex in the center of a residential block is an important aspect of the setting and feeling, and the relationship to the neighboring houses remains intact. The workmanship is clearly expressed throughout the property, unobstructed by additions or changes, and is of excellent quality and in keeping with then-contemporary trends, although the number of features by important period artists and craftsmen is not typical. The retention of some of the original furniture, artwork and finishes is unparalleled in a house of this age and style and comprehensively impart Huston's original intent for this aristocratic home. These works remain character defining features. The feeling and associations of the property as the home and studio of a creative and accomplished architect remain intact.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance:** ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance:** 1900-1927

**Significant Dates:** 1900; 1902; c.1920; 1927

**Significant Person:** N/A

**Cultural Affiliation:** N/A

**Architect/Builder:** Huston, Joseph Miller (1866-1940)

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### Statement of Significance

The Oaks Cloister, located in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia, PA, is a residential property designed between 1900 and 1927 by Joseph M. Huston, a Philadelphia-based architect best known for his design of the Pennsylvania State Capitol, which has been designated a National Historic Landmark. Oaks Cloister was created to be the Huston family's home and also housed Huston's architectural studio. The Oaks Cloister is significant under Criterion C, for its architectural significance. The building complex, set back from neighboring streets by private drives and lovely landscaping, is an extraordinary and eclectic example of a mix of early 20<sup>th</sup> century styles, incorporating Tudor Revival, Renaissance Revival, Colonial Revival, Craftsman and Neoclassical influences and can be interpreted as a domesticated adaptation of Huston's most important commission, the Pennsylvania State Capitol. The interior contains excellent craftsmanship and work by important early 20<sup>th</sup> century artists, reflecting Huston's intent for the Capitol—which was being designed and constructed at the same time Oaks Cloister was being expanded—to unify the work of the architect, artists, and craftspeople. The period of significance begins in 1900 and ends in 1927, when the building complex achieved its final configuration.

### *Property History*

The property site first appears on available map documentation in an 1851 Flynn Map, with the entire block identified as being owned by F. Hartman. At that time there was one large dwelling and one small outbuilding depicted on the lot. An 1871 Hopkins Atlas shows that the lot had since been divided into eight lots. The lot on which the subject property was to be located was owned by W.T. Carter, and no buildings were indicated at that time. By 1885, the Baist Atlas shows that the Carter lot had been extensively subdivided in an irregular configuration with numerous single and paired dwellings. The only owners listed are Edith Wright, E.N. Wright and J.H. Wright. An 1889 Bromley Atlas and an 1895 Baist Atlas show no significant changes. A 1901 Bromley Atlas shows that the parcels owned by E.N. Wright and J.H. Wright have been significantly built up. The parcel owned by Edith Wright has been subdivided and a new building is indicated on the lot (Figure 16). This is the Huston home, although no ownership is attributed. The outline of Lehman Lane also first appears on this map. On a 1910 Bromley Atlas, the studio building has been added to the lot. A 1926 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows the main house, studio, tower and enclosed cloister (Figure 18). The garage was not added until 1927.

In the larger Germantown neighborhood, the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw significant residential growth, as the area offered all the benefits of being located in close proximity to downtown Philadelphia that appealed to residents wanting to leave the congestion of center city for a greener and quieter area. It seemed a natural location for those wishing to design their own homes, but also was perhaps appealing to more artistic types who wished to live slightly apart from the more conservative and established Main Line neighborhoods.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> From the 1930s to the 1950s, stained glass artist and muralist Nicola D'Ascenzo lived at 425 W. Price Street, a house that backed up to Lehman Lane and near the Oaks' front door.

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Construction on the main house began in 1900, shortly after Huston's return from a tour of Europe, and a diary entry reveals that he and his wife, Mathilde, moved in on May 22, 1901. The original design of the house had a simpler, more conventional design with a symmetrical façade, open front porch and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor balcony. (Figure 20) Almost immediately after the house was completed, Huston received the commission for the Pennsylvania State Capitol and, by 1902, he was already undertaking significant renovations to his house, including massive Tudor Revival-influenced gables and porch enclosures on the main house and the construction of a tower addition and the studio building, which contained stables for eight horses on the bottom floor and an architectural studio and offices above.<sup>18</sup> Circa 1920 the open Cloister between the main house and the studio, which then consisted of an allee of oaks, was enclosed with Wissahickon schist to match the remainder of the property. In 1927, the garage was constructed. It was the last substantial change to the property and it presently remains in pristine condition.

Huston and his wife lived in the house until his death in 1940. His wife and son, Craig, then moved into the studio and sold the main house to Reverend and Mrs. Wilbur Gouker. At the death of Huston's son in 1978, the Goukers also purchased the studio. The Goukers owned the property until 2002, when it was sold to the present owner.

#### *Huston's Career*

Joseph Miller Huston (1866-1940) was born in Philadelphia in 1866 and went to work for painters John B. Ellison and Sons in 1880 when he finished school. At seventeen, he started working for the architecture firm of Furness and Evans, where he stayed for five years. Upon graduation from Princeton University in 1892, he returned to Furness and Evans and worked on the Broad Street Station and the Witherspoon Building, both in Philadelphia. Huston belonged to the Presbyterian Social Union, the Union League, the T-Square Club, the Philadelphia chapter of the AIA, the Merion and Germantown Cricket Clubs and the Princeton Club of Philadelphia. In 1897, he formed his own firm with Stanford B. Lewis, with whom he entered and won the Pennsylvania State Capitol competition design in 1901, after being inspired by a recent European tour. Lewis ended up overseeing much of the Capitol's physical construction (1902-1906) while Huston was responsible for coordinating the vision and design.

The Pennsylvania State Capitol Building was by far Huston's most important independent commission (1902, NR 1977, NHL 2006).<sup>19</sup> While with Furness and Evans, he completed other residential commissions, such as the Cassatt and Kennedy Residences in downtown Philadelphia, but neither had the flair or ornamentation that he demonstrated at his own house. His other limited independent projects include the A.B. Kirchbaum Factory on N. Broad Street in Philadelphia (demolished), the First United Presbyterian Church in north Philadelphia and the Wannamaker House in downtown Philadelphia. The only other known residential

<sup>18</sup> Susan Caba, "At Home with Our History." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (21 May 1995): R1 and R7.

<sup>19</sup> Although Huston and Lewis were partners, Huston was the designer and Lewis was in charge of project management. Lewis was not involved in any of the aesthetics.

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commission that can be entirely attributed to Huston is the William Wannamaker House, located at 1917 Walnut Street in Philadelphia. Constructed c.1900, the Classical Revival style rowhouse is a formal city dwelling, which, although it has some whimsical stone carvings at the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, bears little resemblance to the rambling creativity of the Oaks Cloister. In 1930, Huston's partnership with Lewis ended and he retired, never to work again.

Huston routinely said that his goal for the Capitol Building was for it to be an emblem of the Renaissance, the manifestation of architect, painter, sculptor and craftsman working together for a common objective. The Capitol Building, which is known as a nationally significant example of "Renaissance Revival architecture as defined through Beaux-Arts classicism," was Huston's interpretation of the American Renaissance style and his desire to convey the "power and might of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania."<sup>20</sup> The Capitol and Oaks Cloister both originated as essentially remodeling projects. Huston's Capitol commission was to take the not-fully-realized and more modest design of the prior architect,<sup>21</sup> and expand and embellish it. In a similar approach he took his family's respectable but more-typical home, enlarged it, and created an elaborate interior bursting with the achievements of plasterers, woodworkers, sculptors, tile designers, stained glass artisans, and others.

To achieve his goal at the Capitol, Huston assembled a team of successful artists and studios, many with strong Pennsylvania connections. Not content to reserve this assembled cast for a single project, Huston commissioned many of them to work on his house as well, which was underway at the same time as the Capitol project. As such, Oaks Cloister showcases an uncommonly large and impressive range of period artists, but also reflects the artistic vision of a capitol complex imposed on a private residence. This select group of artists found in both projects included Edwin Austin Abbey, William Brantley Van Ingen, George Grey Barnard, Henry Busse and Henry Chapman Mercer.<sup>22</sup> Other artists with whom Huston had long-term professional relationships and friendships and who worked on the house include Alexander Calder and Nicola D'Ascenzo. Oaks Cloister reflects the work of many masters, and the vision of Huston to celebrate and unite multiple styles and influences.

*The following information regarding work by artists and studios featured in the Oaks Cloister is largely excerpted from a Historic Resource Survey Form prepared for Oaks Cloister and submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office in May, 1995.*

William Brantley Van Ingen, who painted the murals in the Capitol's South Corridor and executed the stained glass windows for both chambers of the House and Senate, fabricated the stained glass window at the top of the staircase leading from the 1<sup>st</sup> story to the lower

<sup>20</sup> "Pennsylvania State Capitol Building." *National Historic Landmark*, January 2006: 26.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Ives Cobbs designed the 1897 building that replaced the earlier Capitol lost to a devastating fire. At that time, the legislature decided not to fully commit to realizing Cobbs' intended plan, resulting in a fairly plain "box" that Huston used as a starting point for his ultimate creation.

<sup>22</sup> Violet Oakley, whose murals are a prominent feature of the Capitol's interior, also painted several paintings for Huston that were originally hung in the house but are no longer part of its collection.

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level library, which is very similar in style, composition, and subject matter to his Capitol windows. Both depict a seated female allegorical figure representing industry or the liberal arts; in the case of the Oaks Cloister, Architecture. Above the figure are the words "Ex Libris" and below reads "Joseph M. Huston." The actual design for the window, however, came from another Capitol artist, mural painter Edwin Austin Abbey, who also designed the bookplate for Huston's personal library. Abbey was also involved in the Capitol, painting the murals in the Capitol rotunda and in the House of Representatives.

Sculptor George Grey Barnard, who was commissioned to create the two monumental sculptural groups flanking the Capitol main entrance, is also featured in Huston's residence. Located in a niche in the library is a sculptural figure by Barnard called "Lady in the Waves." Huston reportedly bought this statue from Barnard after the original patron rejected it. The niche is lined with glass mosaics laid over gold leaf in a process similar to that used in the Capitol rotunda. In 1906 Huston designed the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial in front of the Centre County Courthouse in Barnard's hometown of Bellefonte, Pennsylvania.

Henry Chapman Mercer's Moravian tile factory manufactured the tiles covering the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the Capitol. Mercer tile can be found in several locations throughout Huston's home, including the floors of the rathskeller, a fireplace surround on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and in the floors and a fireplace surround in the studio.

Another Capitol connection can be found in the Turkish-style Berlin rug that graces the floor of the library. The rug was imported by the W. & J. Sloane Company of New York, who also secured rugs for formal areas of the Capitol.

At the landing of the main staircase, there is a ten-foot long sculpted leather mural by Henry Busse above the window. The mural presents an allegory of the Huston family, and depicts Huston as an early Renaissance architect with a cathedral-like structure located symbolically in the background. A monk is shown drafting architectural plans at the mural's extreme right.<sup>23</sup> Busse was also commissioned to execute similar figurative leather murals for the Lieutenant Governor's Reception Room in the Capitol. The leather murals, however, proved too costly and never came to fruition, although his decorative leather was installed above the wainscoting in this room.

In the Cloister is Huston's drafting table, on which he drew his designs for the Capitol Building. It is an arts-and-crafts style oak table with a representation of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling inlaid under glass in the tabletop. The Cloister also features a bronze bust of Huston, which was cast by the Henry Bonnard Bronze Company, the same firm

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<sup>23</sup> Huston had originally planned to commission Busse to create sculpted figurative leather for the Lieutenant Governor's Reception Room in the Capitol. The sculpted leather would have given a pictorial effect akin to murals. This plan, however, proved too costly and never came to fruition, although decorative leather was installed in the room.

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responsible for the casting the Capitol bronze doors, as well as the chandeliers and light standards throughout the Capitol. The bronze colored slip cast relief portrait of Huston's brother Samuel, located in the fireplace in the Studio, bears the name of the Henry Bonnard Bronze Company.

In addition to these objects, Oaks Cloister still contains original drawings, papers, photographs and documents from Huston's personal archival collection, many of which relate directly to the Capitol project. For example, an original watercolor rendering of the Capitol signed by Huston still hangs in the library. Another watercolor rendering by Huston of the Capitol bronze door is located in the Cloister. Other items include Huston's scrapbook of photographs of the Capitol project; Huston's scrapbook of photographs of the Barnard Statue installation at the Capitol; an original copy of Charles H. Caffin's book *Handbook of the New Capitol of Pennsylvania*, published in 1906; an original copy of Huston's *Architectural and Art Contracts: The Capitol, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, published by friends of Joseph M. Huston circa 1906-7; an original signed copy by Henry Chapman Mercer of *The Tiled Pavement in the Capitol of Pennsylvania*; and black and white prints of Edwin Austin Abbey's paintings for the Capitol rotunda, as well as prints of *Penn's Treaty with the Indians* and *Baron Von Steuben instructing the recruits at Valley Forge* from the House Chamber.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the house is the intact and pristine condition of the interior finishes.<sup>24</sup> Beginning in the early 2000s, a full assessment was conducted on the house, which determined that while the original plasterwork, woodwork and glazing was largely intact, many of the paint finishes were not original. Throughout the house, any damaged plasterwork was replaced to match, and any missing or deteriorated wood elements were replaced in kind. Any gilded surfaces were re-gilded to match, and the painted areas were repainted according to their original designs and colors. As such, the unusual quality and aesthetic of the house not only sets the house apart from its upper middle-class neighbors, but also limits the number of comparable homes in Philadelphia and attests to Huston's talent.

In many ways Oaks Cloister reflects Huston's successful goals for the Capitol, creating an impressive building filled with a rich interior program of expert finishes and decorative arts. Huston's own expertise is matched with the work of individual experts and craftspeople throughout.

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<sup>24</sup> Sean Scully, "Total Makeover." *Philadelphia Business Journal* (2 June 2006): 6-9.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Caba , Susan. "At Home with Our History." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (21 May 1995): R1 and R7.

Hubbert-Kemper, Ruthann. Research by the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee on file in the Committee Offices, Harrisburg, and in the private collection of the current Oaks Cloister owner.

"Joseph M. Huston." [https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/25237](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/25237). Accessed on June 25, 2018.

"Oaks Cloister", *Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form*, May 1995.

"Pennsylvania State Capitol Building." *National Historic Landmark* nomination form; National Park Service; January 2006.

Scully, Sean. "Total Makeover." *Philadelphia Business Journal* (2 June 2006): 6-9.

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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 #
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

### Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

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### Geographical Data

Acres of Property less than 1 acre

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

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Latitude: 40.028840

Longitude: -75.185275

### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Oaks Cloister is shown on the accompanying tax parcel and site plan maps (Figures 3, 4 and 5). The boundary includes the tax parcels for 3 Lehman Lane (known as OPA 593209760 or parcel #048N140107) and 5829 Wissahickon Avenue (known as OPA 593209730 or parcel #048N140092).

### Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire tax parcels on which the building complex and related site is situated, including the private drive and flanking walls. No known extant historically associated resources have been excluded.

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## 10. Form Prepared By

name/title: Logan I. Ferguson, Senior Associate

organization: Powers and Company, Inc.

street & number: 1315 Walnut Street, Suite 1717

city or town: Philadelphia state: PA zip code: 19107

e-mail: logan@powersco.net telephone: (215) 636-0192 date: January 15, 2019

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## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

## Photographs

### Photograph Log

Name of Property: Oaks Cloister

City or Vicinity: Philadelphia County: Philadelphia State: PA

Photographer: Robert Powers, Powers and Company, Inc.

Date Photographed: June 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

<i>Photograph #</i>	<i>Description of Photograph</i>
1.	West elevation, view southeast
2.	West elevation, Entrance, view northeast
3.	West elevation, view southeast
4.	West elevation, Entrance, view southeast
5.	Studio, East elevation, view west

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6.	Studio, South elevation, view north
7.	East elevation, view west
8.	Cloister, South elevation, view east
9.	East and south elevations, view northwest
10.	South elevation, view northwest
11.	West elevation, Entrance, view east
12.	1 <sup>st</sup> floor, Stairway, view east
13.	1 <sup>st</sup> floor, view north
14.	1 <sup>st</sup> floor, view south
15.	1 <sup>st</sup> floor, view west
16.	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, Stairway, view east
17.	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, view east
18.	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, view east
19.	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, view north
20.	3 <sup>rd</sup> floor, view south
21.	Library, Stairway, view east
22.	Library, view east
23.	Library, view south
24.	Cloister, view east
25.	Cloister, view west
26.	Studio, view southwest
27.	Studio, view west

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<i>Figure #</i>	<i>Description of Figure</i>
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2.	Aerial View, 2018
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4.	Parcel Map on Aerial View
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11.	Library and House, basement level
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20.	Oaks Cloister, 1901. Susan Caba, "At Home with Our History." <i>The Philadelphia</i>

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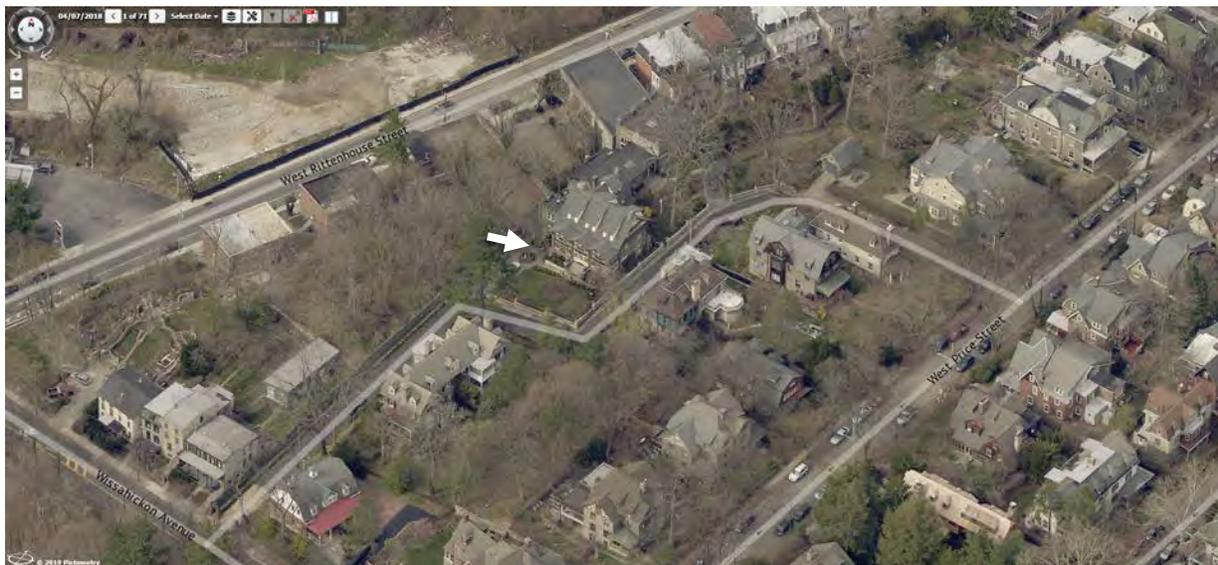
	<i>Inquirer (21 May 1995): R7.</i>
21.	Joseph M. Huston. <a href="https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/25237">https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/25237</a> . Accessed on June 28, 2018.
22.	Dining room, Historic photograph, Courtesy of property owner.
23.	Library, Historic photograph, Courtesy of property owner.

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**Figure 1:** USGS Map excerpt; arrow pointing to approximate location of the main house, roughly indicated by red box.



**Figure 2:** Aerial View, 2018. Arrow pointing to the main house.

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**Figure 3:** Map showing tax parcels included within the boundary (shaded), based on Philadelphia's parcel data available online at atlas.phila.gov, for parcels 048N140092 (5829 Wissahickon Street) and 048N140107 (3 Lehman Street).



**Figure 4:** Parcels and associated private drive shown on aerial view, with nominated property shaded and outlined (approximate).

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**Figure 5:** Site Plan with NR boundary. Included within the boundary is the private drive, Lehman Lane, and flanking walls.

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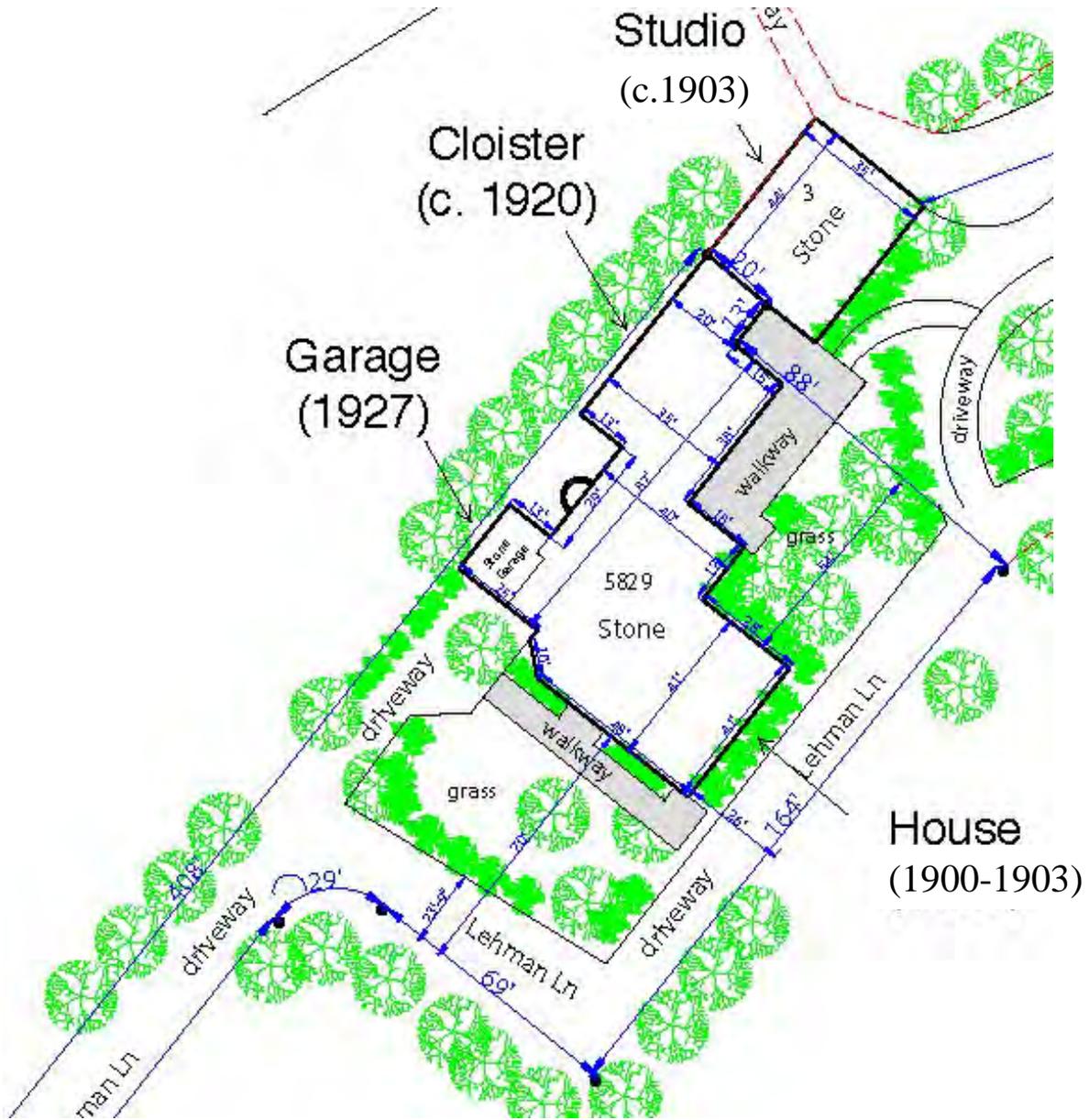
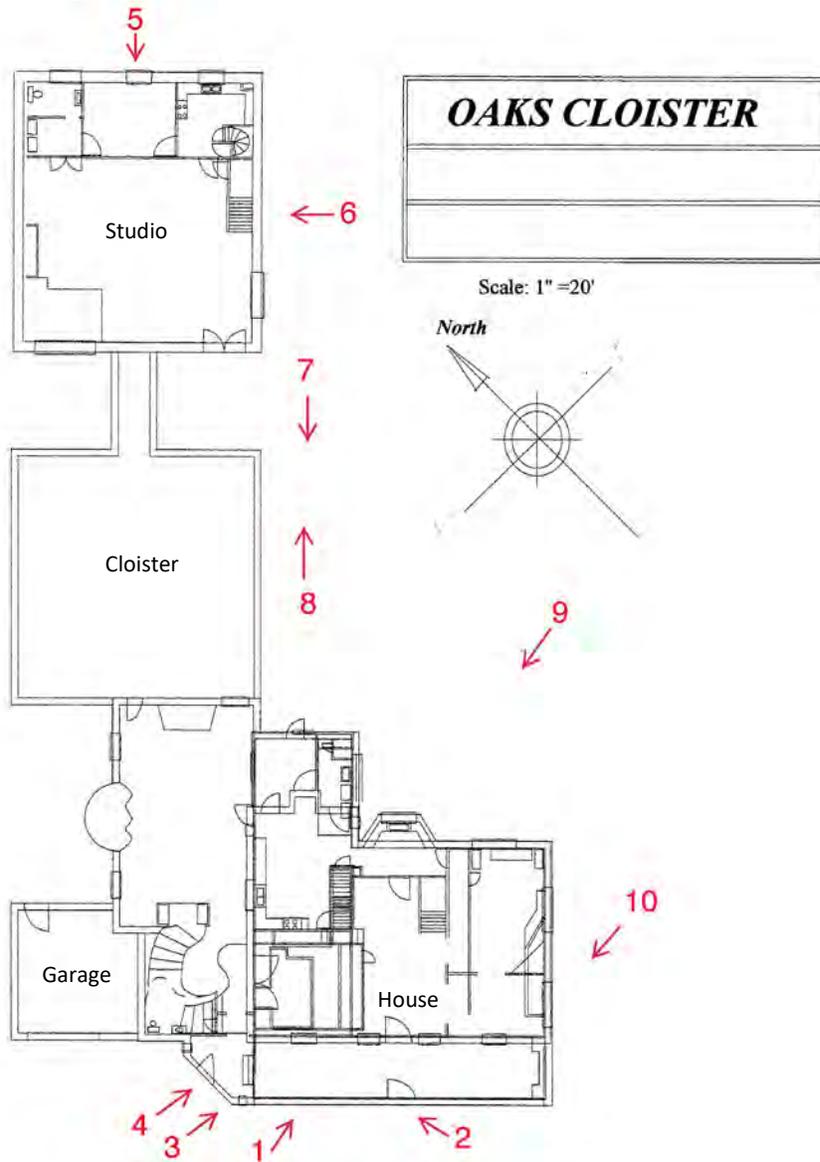


Figure 6: Building Chronology

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**Figure 7:** Complex plan showing House with Attached Garage, Cloister, and Studio; exterior photo key.

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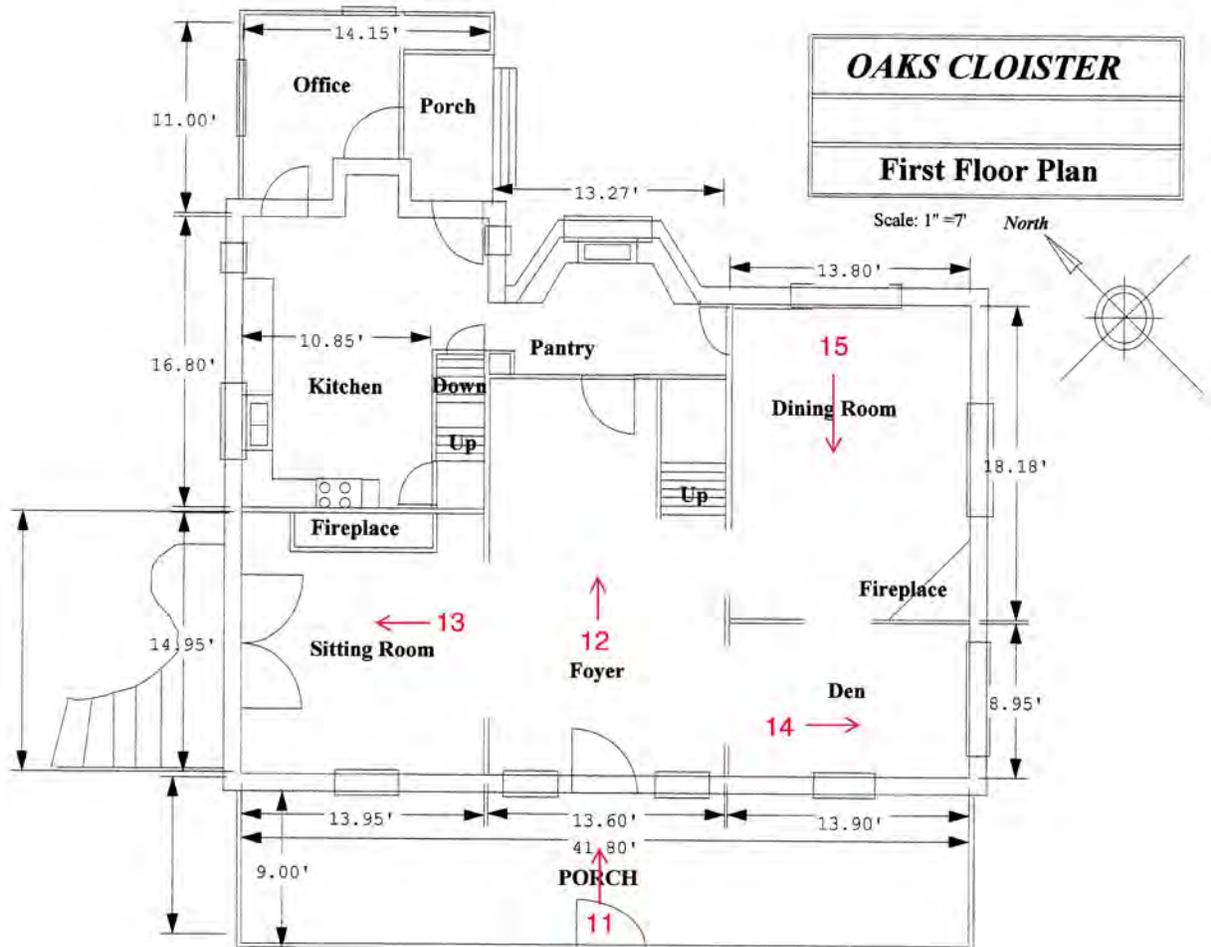


Figure 8: House, first floor plan, showing interior photo locations

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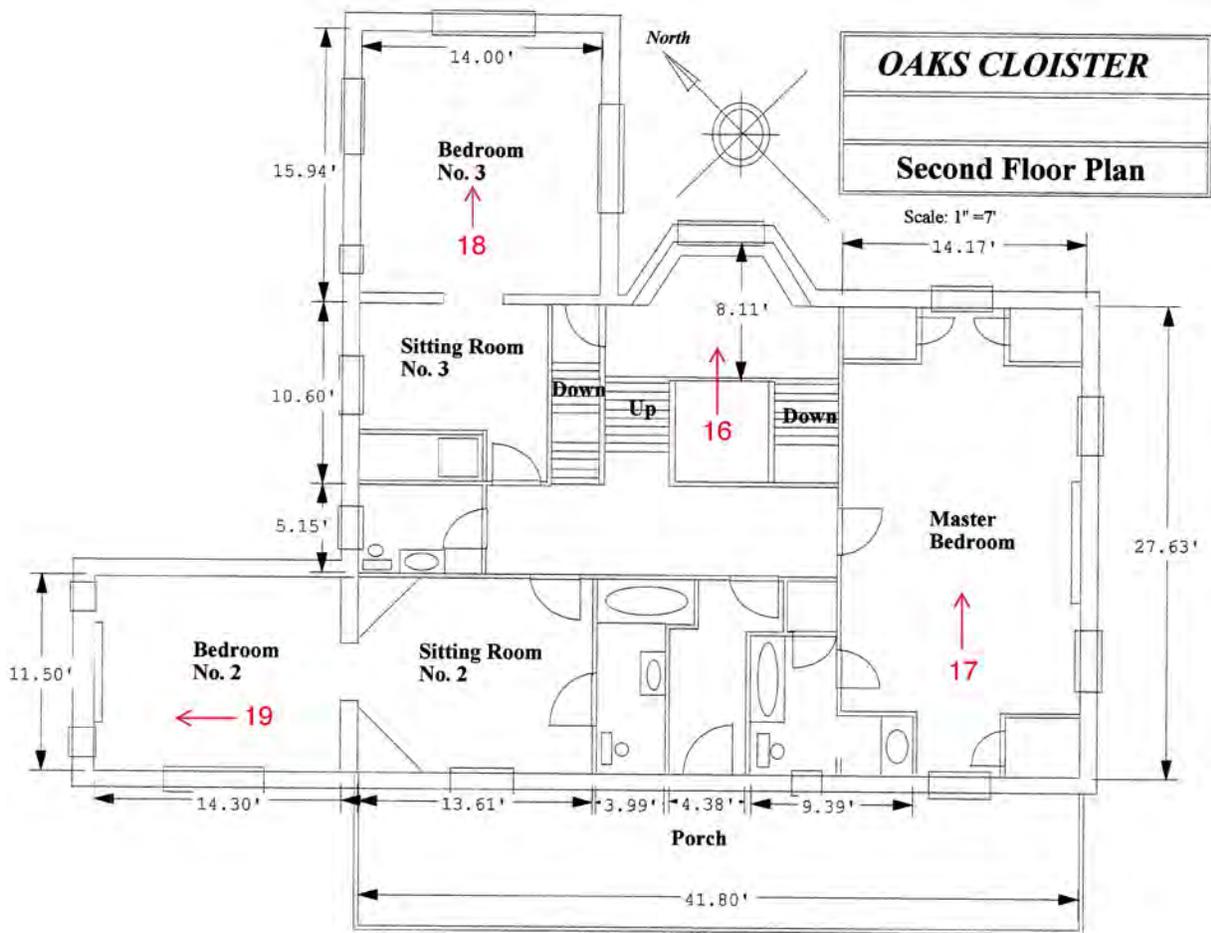


Figure 9: House, second floor plan, showing photo locations

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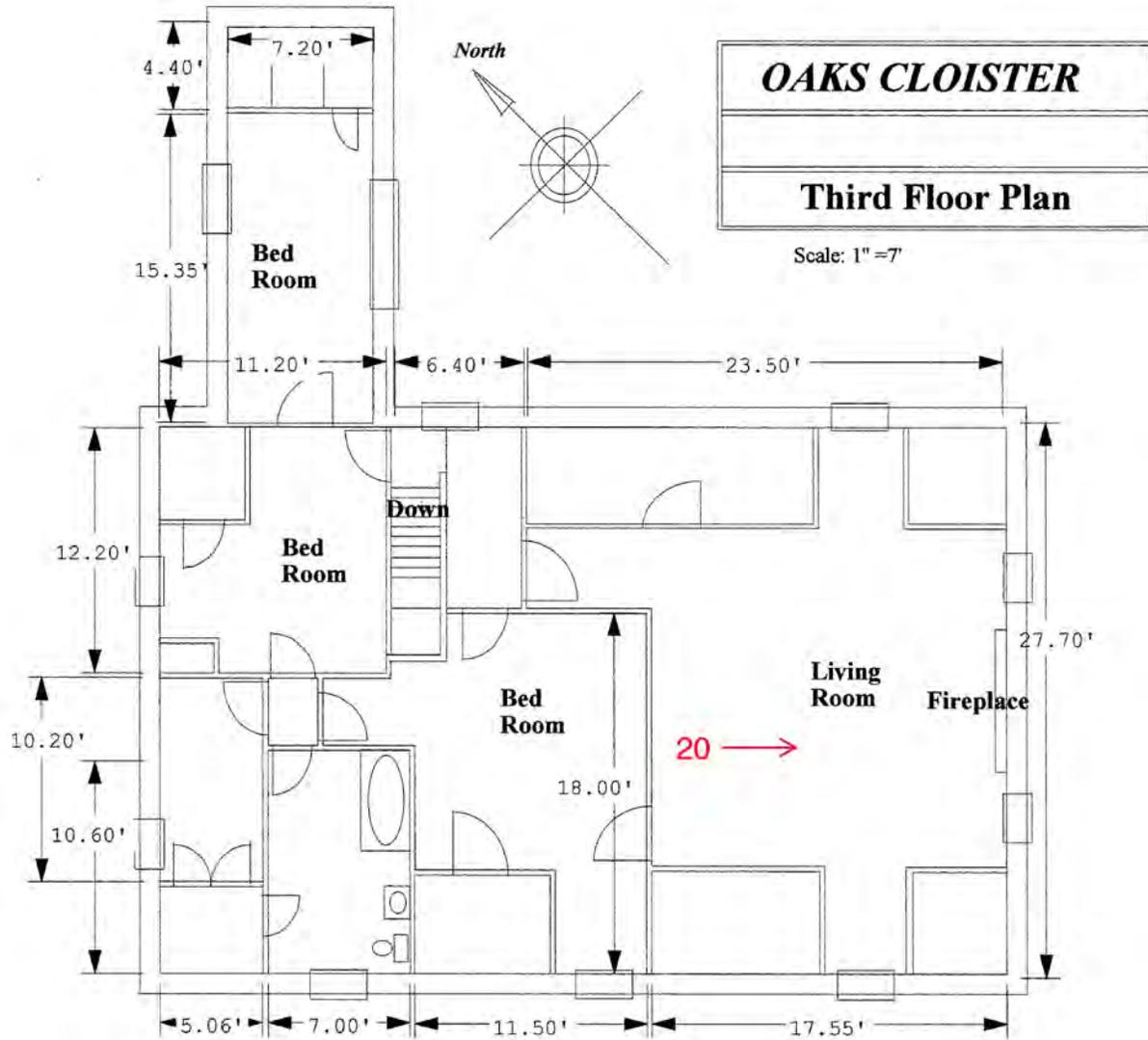


Figure 10: House, third floor, showing photo location.

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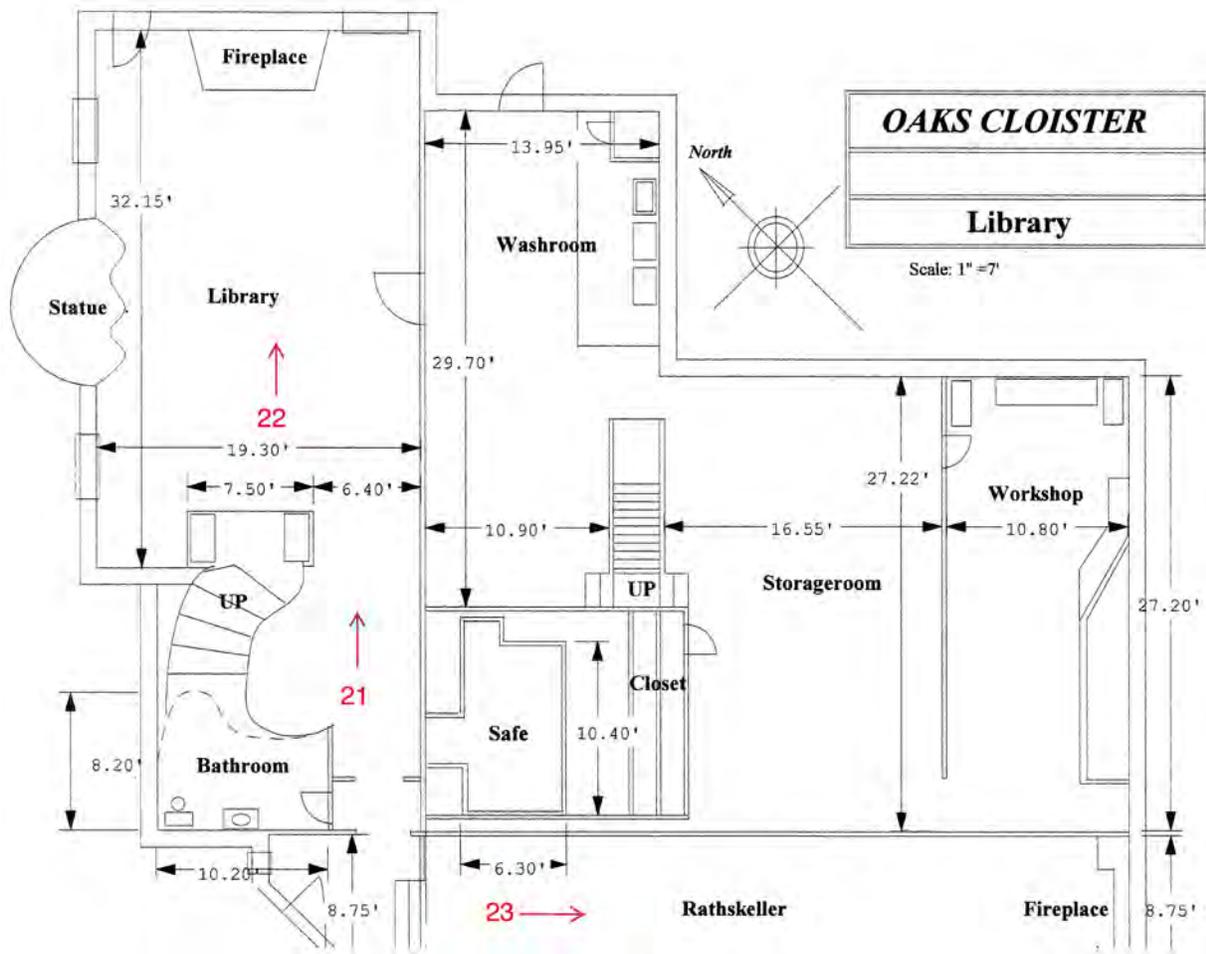


Figure 11: Library (in the tower section, to the left) and House, Basement level, showing photo locations.

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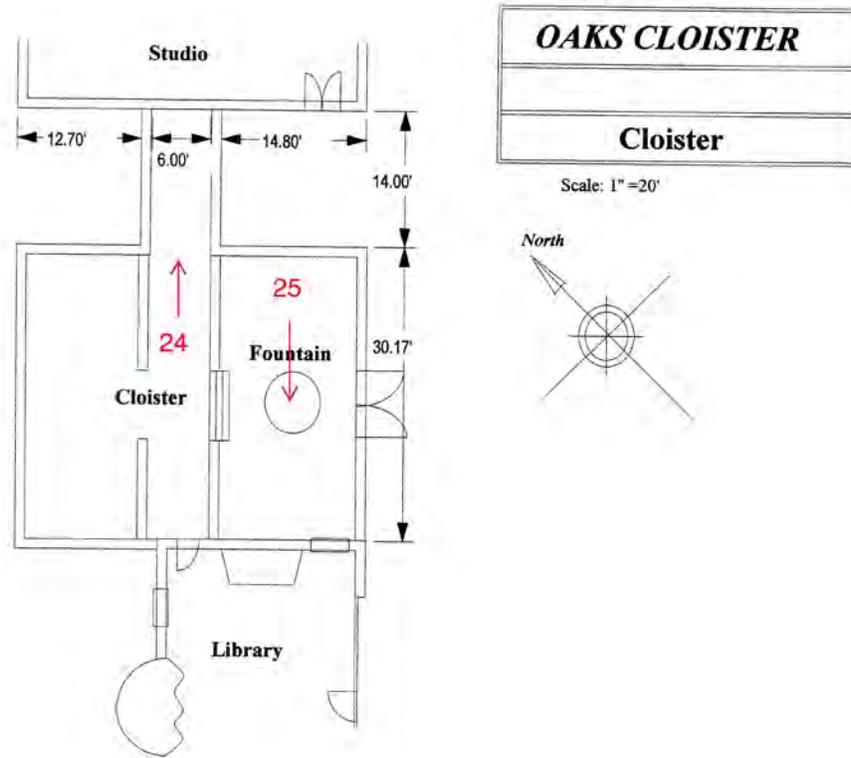


Figure 12: Cloister plan, showing photo locations

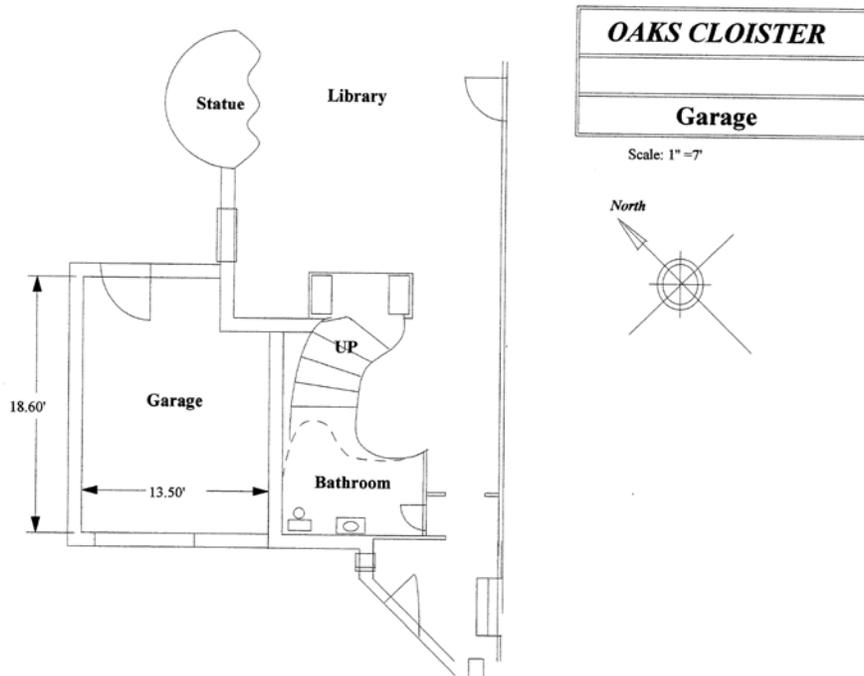


Figure 13: Garage plan

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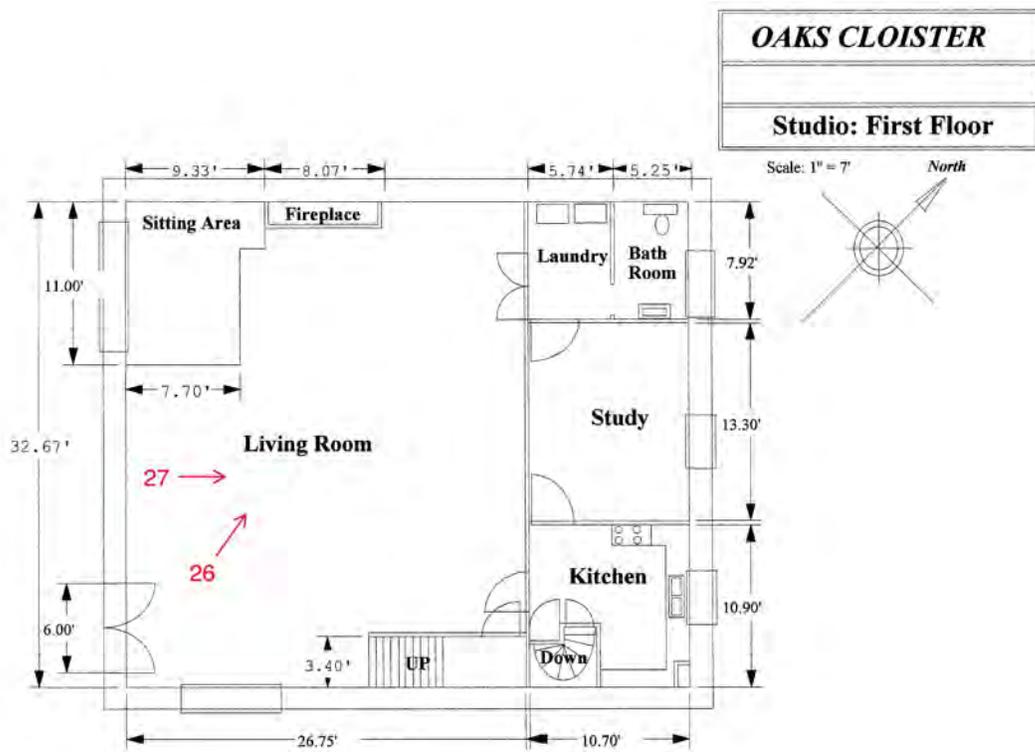


Figure 14: Studio, first floor plan, showing photo locations

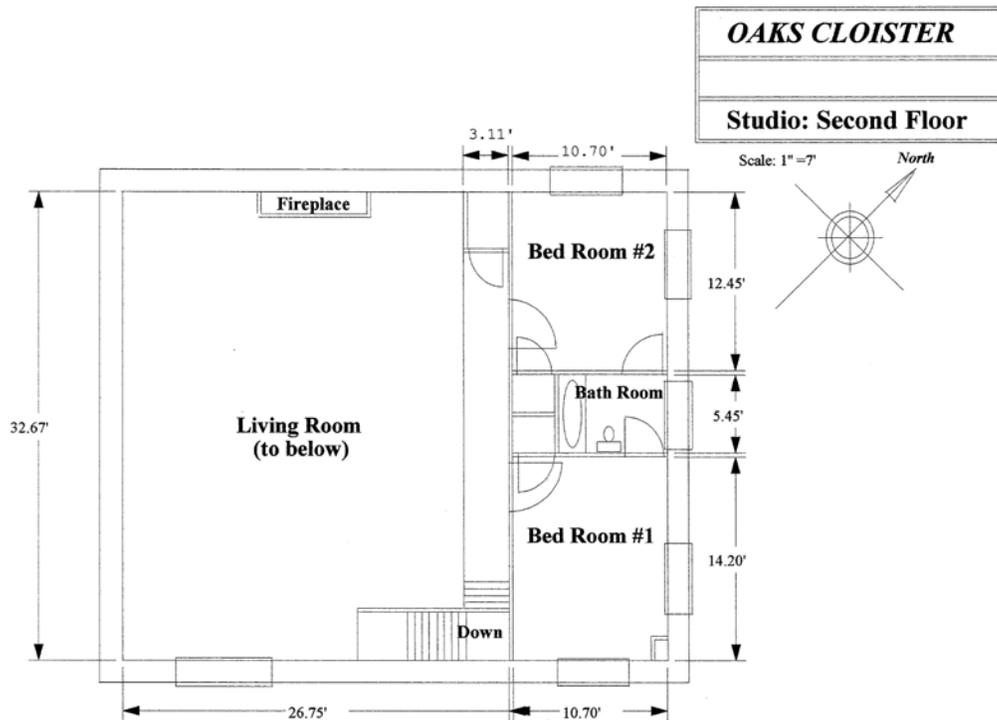


Figure 15: Studio, second floor plan

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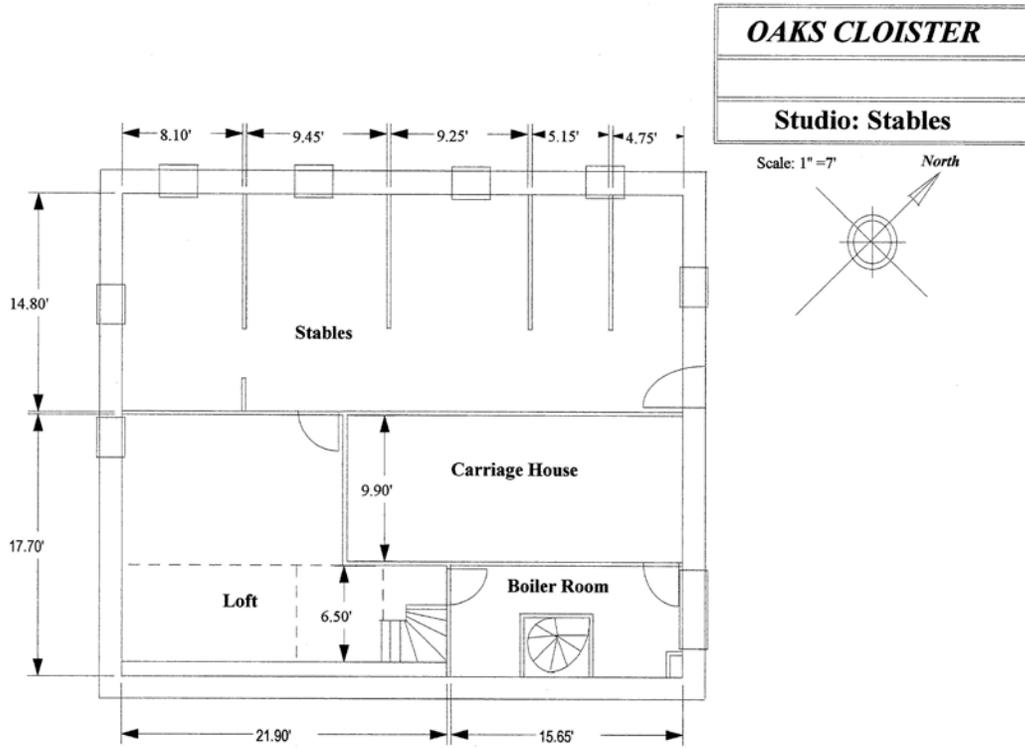


Figure 16: Studio stable-level (ground floor) plan

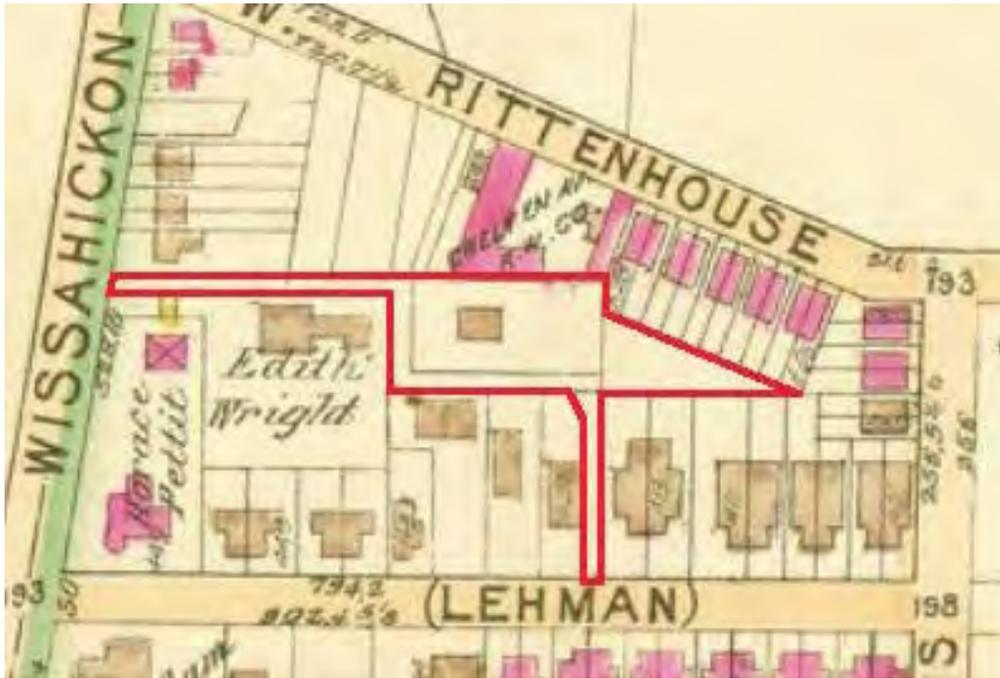


Figure 17 – Bromley Atlas, 1901. The subject property is outlined in red (approximate).

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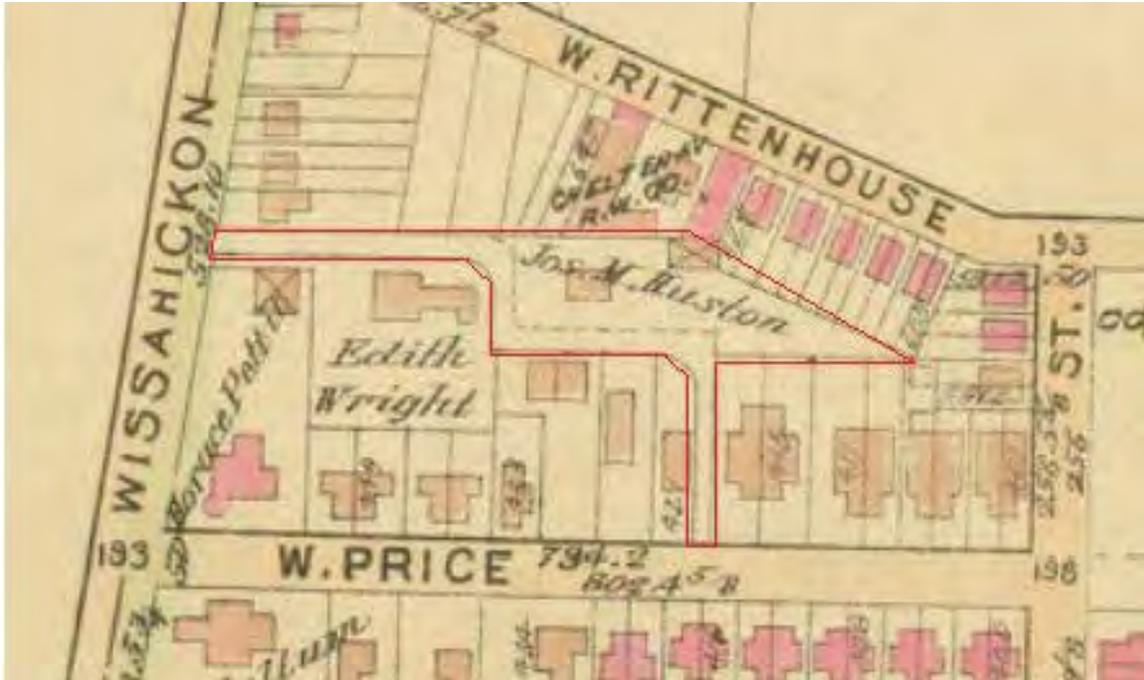


Figure 18 – Bromley Atlas, 1910. The subject property is outlined in red (approximate).

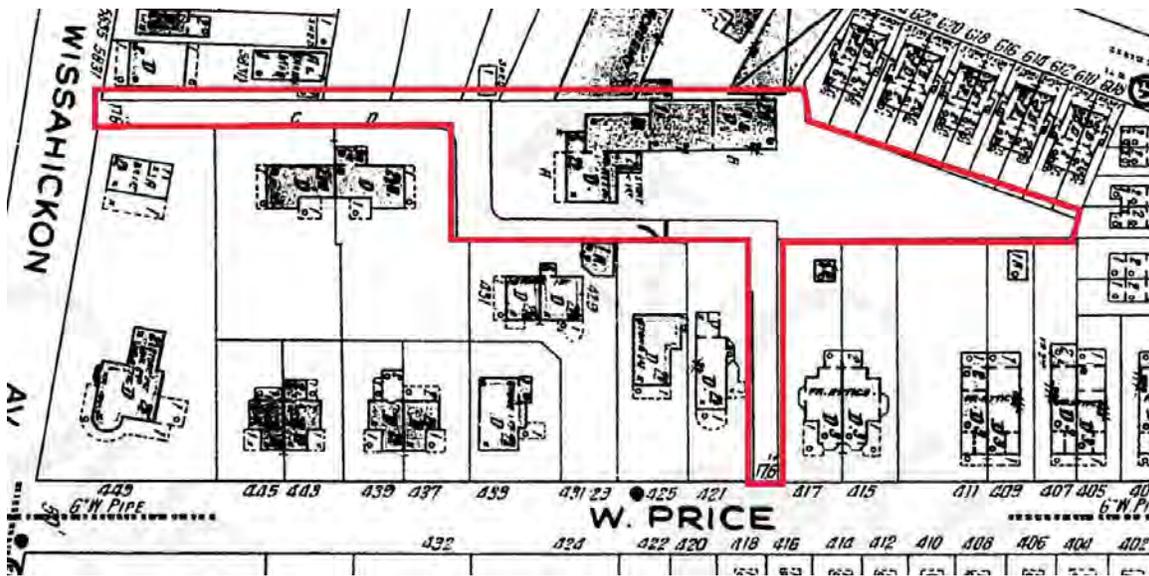


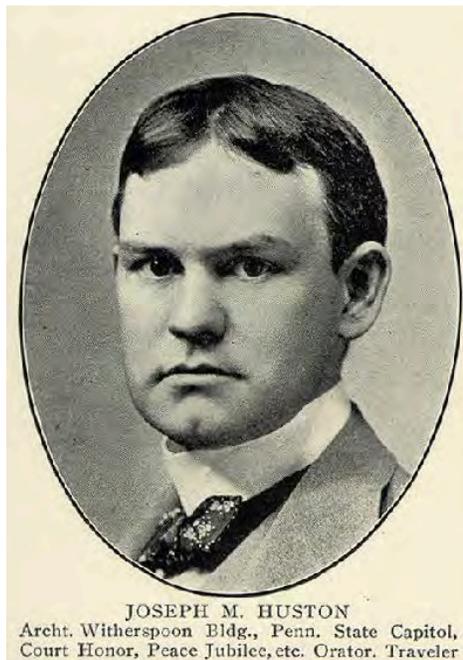
Figure 19 – Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1926. The subject property is outlined in red (approximate).

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**Figure 20** – Oaks Cloister, 1901, prior to Huston’s expansion project. From Susan Caba’s “At Home with Our History” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, (21 May 1995): R7.



**Figure 21** – Joseph M. Huston. [https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/25237](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/25237). Accessed on June 28, 2018.

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**Figure 22** – Dining room, Historic photograph, Courtesy of property owner.



**Figure 23** – Library, Historic photograph, Courtesy of property owner.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



5829  
W. 10th Street





5829

Jeep  
ELDIN  
D. H. H. H. H. H.

5829  
THE OAKS GLOSTER



Step Down  
Please  
watch your step

















02:17































UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Oaks Cloister

Multiple Name:

State & County: PENNSYLVANIA, Philadelphia

Date Received: 3/6/2019      Date of Pending List: 3/21/2019      Date of 16th Day: 4/5/2019      Date of 45th Day: 4/22/2019      Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: SG100003636

Nominator: Other Agency, SHPO

Reason For Review:

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal           | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL            | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request     | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape       | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver           | <input type="checkbox"/> National        | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission     | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period             |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP             | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG             |   |

Accept       Return       Reject      4/22/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary AOS: Architecture, Joseph Miller Huston, architect; POS: 1900-1927; LOS: local.  
Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria National Register Criterion C.

Reviewer Lisa Deline

Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2239

Date 4/22/19

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No      see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



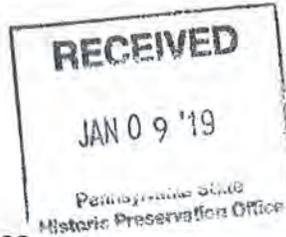
# CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION

1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102  
Tel: 215.686.7660

Robert Thomas, AIA  
Chair

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.  
Executive Director



4 January 2019

Elizabeth Rairigh  
Division Chief, Preservation Services  
PA State Historic Preservation Office  
400 North Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0093

Re: 5829 Wissahickon Avenue, Oaks Cloister

Dear Ms. Rairigh:

I am writing in response to your request that the Philadelphia Historical Commission provide its official Certified Local Government recommendation on the nomination proposing to add the Oaks Cloister, 5829 Wissahickon Avenue in Philadelphia, to the National Register of Historic Places. At its monthly public meeting on 14 December 2018, the Philadelphia Historical Commission reviewed and discussed the nomination and accepted public testimony.

The Commission agreed that the building satisfies Criterion C in the Area of Architecture, as an extraordinary example of early twentieth-century architecture, incorporating Tudor Revival, Renaissance Revival, Colonial Revival, Craftsman and Neoclassical styles, and as a domestic adaptation of architect Joseph M. Huston's most important commission, the Pennsylvania State Capitol. The Commission supported the National Register nomination for 5829 Wissahickon Avenue.

Thank you for providing the Philadelphia Historical Commission with the opportunity to comment on this amendment.

Yours truly,

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

February 26, 2019

Andrea MacDonald, Director  
Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office  
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission  
400 North Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

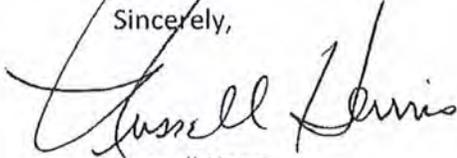
Re: Oaks Cloister, 5829 Wissahickon Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19144 (SHPO ID #103710)

Dear Ms. MacDonald:

I am writing to request that the nomination to the National Register for Historic Places for the property known as the Oaks Cloister, located at 5829 Wissahickon Avenue, Philadelphia, be forwarded to the National Park Service (NPS) for formal review.

I, as the current owner, have no objection to the listing of this property on the National Register for Historic Places pursuant to Section 36 CFR 60.6(t).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Russell Harris". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Russell Harris  
Owner

Summary of Minutes—Excerpt  
PENNSYLVANIA HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD MEETING  
February 5, 2019

Oaks Cloister National Register Nomination Discussion

The Oaks Cloister discussion was seventh on the agenda of nomination reviews. Staff member April Frantz provided a brief overview of the property. Russell Harris, property owner, acknowledged the owners' desire for listing and intent to ensure future stewardship and enjoyment of the property.

Cara Haldeman asserted that the Criterion C argument was not made as presented, and noted that there were no paragraphs describing character defining features of the various styles noted, there were no comparables provided, there was no context provided for where Huston found influences, and no discussion of his other residential designs. Jeff Slack noted a very deliberative attempt to reference other European manor houses, yet no comparisons were provided, and that there was no conclusion. He found the content to be disorganized, and requested a "plan North" for the site and floor plans as the house sits at a 45 degree angle. Rob Armstrong reported that had he not visited the property in person he may have struggled to understand the nomination but it is indeed a hodgepodge, with limited—if any—local comparisons. He compared it to a "laboratory of styles." John Conti suggested reorganizing the content and focusing on the idea that this is an idiosyncratic hodgepodge that Huston built for himself. Jeff requested explanations of what the character defining features are for each style. Rob asserted that the nomination doesn't need an extensive revision, just some clarification on the property's eclecticism and the reflection of the architect's personality. John asks why not have them reframe the argument, that he had a strange career and designed a strange house for himself. Sue Hannegan noted that Huston has a presence in Centre County, having designed the Soldiers & Sailors Memorial in front of the courthouse in Bellefonte (the hometown of sculptor Barnard), and asked for that to be mentioned in the nomination. Staff member Pamela Reilly noted the similarity in Huston's essential remodel of a smaller and simpler building for the grand Capitol building, and his remodel of his own more-modest house. Steve Burg suggested focusing more on the architect's work as a master, and of the collection of masters also displayed in the house, and less than significance for styles. Rob reported that the descriptions in the current nomination were fine for visitors that have seen the house in person, it's simply hard to appreciate it as it changes from room to room. He believes that with a few more paragraphs the nomination can address all concerns, and that the nomination could emphasize the microcosm of early 20<sup>th</sup> century artisans. Jeff insisted on the Board needing to see the nomination in its rewritten form prior to voting on it. John Conti noted that he'd like to vote "yes" but needs a better reason why. Jeff agreed that it is a National Register worthy property but not in this nomination. Steve Burg asked for the Board to clarify what they are requesting be revised for the record and the benefit of the preparer. Items requested were other works by Huston for comparison, examples of other works by architects designing for their personal homes, incorporating Pamela's reference to embellishing for formerly plain box (as he did in the Capitol).

John Conti made a motion to reject the nomination and invite a resubmission with revisions. Cara Haldeman seconded the motion. The motion passed, with Rob Armstrong and Ira

Beckerman voting against the motion. In discussion immediately following the vote, Ira Beckerman observed that he did not have any problem with the nomination as presented. Rob noted for the record that he felt the shortcomings could be addressed through a revision to the intro paragraph and a few other sentences in the statement of significance. He questioned the need to resubmit this for a later meeting, as the Board has approved other nominations with a similar amount of revision requested from the staff or preparer post-Board meeting. Jane Sheffield questioned her vote.

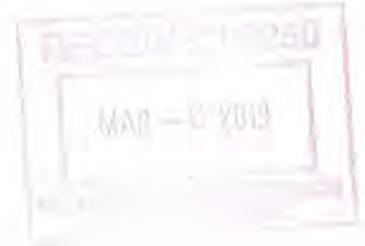


# Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office

PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION

February 27, 2019

Joy Beasley, Keeper  
National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service, US Department of Interior  
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228  
Washington DC 20240



Re: John Updike Childhood Home, Berks County  
Oaks Cloister, Philadelphia

Dear Ms. Beasley:

Enclosed please find the National Register of Historic Places nominations for the above properties. Included is the signed first page of each nomination, CDs containing the true and correct copies of the nominations, letters of support, and CDs with tif images.

The proposed action for the **John Updike Childhood Home** is listing at the *national* level of significance, in recognition of the impact of this home and the surrounding area upon John Updike's literary career. Our Board also supports this nomination.

The proposed action for the **Oaks Cloister** is listing. The Philadelphia Historical Commission supports listing. Our Board supports the eligibility of the property, but members were divided in their votes to endorse the nomination presented to them. Some members urged what they considered to be extensive revisions and a return of the nomination to their next Board meeting. A summary of their meeting discussion is enclosed. Our staff edited the nomination, and supports listing with the nomination submitted here. The owner of the property has requested the nomination be submitted to the Keeper at this time. His letter is enclosed.

If you have any questions regarding the Updike or Oaks Cloister nominations or our requests for action, please contact me at 717-783-9922 or [afrantz@pa.gov](mailto:afrantz@pa.gov). Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

Sincerely,

April E. Frantz  
National Register Reviewer

enc.