

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form - National Historic Landmark Nomination

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Merion Golf Club, East and West Courses
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number	Ardmore Ave.	N/A not for publication			
city, town	Ardmore (Haverford Twp.)	N/A vicinity			
state	PA	code PA	county Delaware	code 045	zip code 19003

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	2	7 buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	2	0 sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object		objects
		4	7 Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 4

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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

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.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation/sports facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation/sports facility**7. Description**Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)Colonial Revival East
Vernacular West

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone
walls stucco
roof asphalt
other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Merion Golf Club in Ardmore, Pennsylvania is a discontiguous historic district. The district is composed of two eighteen hole golf courses separated by approximately one half mile. Two contributing buildings and five noncontributing buildings are located on the courses. The main clubhouse and the three largest storage and maintenance buildings are situated on the East Course. A second smaller clubhouse and two storage and maintenance buildings are situated on the West Course.

The courses are woven through a suburban setting. The stone homes and yards surrounding the courses are mature with major, fully grown trees. The two courses have the same sense of maturity. Rich greens are defined by eighty-foot oaks and beeches. In two areas the courses are punctuated by a small abandoned quarry. The design for the courses was derived from the existing landscape; the East Course more gently contoured, with the West Course ruggedly falling down an extended slope to Darby Creek. The two courses are not contiguous; they are close together but are separated by homes of the main line suburbs, a situation that helps to meld the courses with their surroundings. The separation of the two courses by one half mile was not by choice, but resulted from the availability of parcels of land large enough to support two eighteen-hole courses. One of the unusual aspects of Merion's courses is that they are not in a more rural setting, but are bounded by homes and streets and even on the northeast side of the East Course by a small, still active, commuter rail line.

The East Course is 130.6 acres and of the two courses it is the most challenging and the one that golfers such as Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus refer to when they talk about the unique difficulty of Merion. Nicklaus is quoted by Kaye W. Kessler of the Columbus Citizen Journal, "Merion is one of those old time golf courses that doesn't have the length but still stands the test. That is the mark of a great golf course." The course is roughly "L" shaped with the short side containing holes 1 and 13 through 18, and the long side containing holes 2 through 12. The two sides

8. Statement of Significance

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

 nationally statewide locallyApplicable National Register Criteria A B C D

NHL Criteria #1

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

1912-1942

Significant Dates

1912

Landscape Architecture

1914

NHL Theme: XXXIV Recreation

1942

A. Sports

9 - Golf

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Valentine, Joseph

Architect/Builder

Wilson, Hugh Irvine

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Merion Golf Club is nationally important as one of the premier golf courses in the United States. The Merion Golf Club contains two of the first courses in the country to be designed in a combination of "penal" and "strategic" designs. Penal designs, which predominated in the United States before Merion Golf Club's East and West courses were laid out between 1911 and 1914, punished any variation from the prescribed pathway between tee and cup. "Strategic" courses, which became more widely used after Merion Golf Club was constructed, offered golfers alternate pathways on each hole. Merion Golf Course was also designed by one of the pre-eminent golf course designers in the United States, Hugh I. Wilson. Merion Golf Club has gained further importance in the history of golfing as the site of major tournaments including the 1916 United States Men's Amateur Championship, the 1924 United States Men's Amateur Championship, the 1926 United States Women's Amateur Championship, the 1930 United States Men's Amateur Championship, and the 1934 United States Open Men's Championship. Finally, Merion Golf Club is significant in association with its groundskeeper Joseph Valentine, noted for his promotion of golf course maintenance and his discovery of Merion blue grass which became widely popular for golf courses and home lawns.

Merion Golf Club began as an adjunct to the Merion Cricket Club, which had been founded in 1865. Golf in the Philadelphia area seems first to have been played at the Philadelphia Country Club in 1891 with courses following in short order at the Devon Golf Club and the Philadelphia Cricket Club. On a rented field near its cricket club at Haverford in Montgomery County, Merion opened its premier course in 1896, expanded to eighteen holes in 1900. During the earliest years of this century, rubber-core balls replaced gutta-percha ones with the result that golf course had to grow longer. Across the Delaware County line in Ardmore, an L-shaped plot of 130.6 acres that became the East Course was purchased in 1910. The old course was closed on September 12,

 See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

H. Richard Heilman, Golf at Merion 1896-1976. Ardmore: Merion Golf Club, 1977 (Nicklaus quote)
Arnold Palmer with Bob Drum, Arnold Palmer's Best 54 Golf Holes. Garden City: Doubleday, 1977. (quote pg. 90).
Pat Ward-Thomas et al. World Atlas of Golf. New York: Random House, 1976. (quote pg. 153)
Herbert Warren Wind, "Return to Merion," New Yorker, July 17, 1971 (quote pg. 56)
Kaye W. Kessler, 81st U. S. Open Championships, June 1981. (Nicklaus quote)

See continuation sheet

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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 256.8 (East Course 130.6, West Course 126.2)

UTM References

A 1 1 8 4 1 7 3 1 1 8 0 4 1 4 2 8 4 1 1 0
Zone Easting Northing
C 1 1 8 4 1 7 3 2 1 6 0 4 1 4 2 7 5 1 8 0

B 1 1 8 4 1 7 2 9 0 5 4 1 4 2 8 2 1 8 0
Zone Easting Northing
D 1 1 8 4 1 7 3 5 0 0 4 1 4 2 7 5 1 8 0

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet

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Merion Golf Club

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are separated by Ardmore Avenue, a rather average suburban street. To serious golfers there are qualities about Merion East that distinguish this course from most others. By the time the first hole is completed, you are impressed by the near perfect level of maintenance for the fairway, green and roughs. By the third or fourth hole the frequency of bunkers, 116 in all, the placement of the bunkers and the clumps of high grass seriously test the golfer's control. In addition to the ongoing hazards built into the course, there are singular holes. Hole 11 starts on the top of a rise, the fairway then falls away to a green hidden from the tee and to a slightly raised green surrounded on three sides by a meandering stream. Jack Nicklaus admits that this is one of his most consistently enjoyable holes. Hole 16 again starts at the top of a rise with the green visible from the tee, but not from the fairway thirty feet below, and then the approach is made across a broom (plant) filled, shallow quarry to an undulating green. Hole 18 heads back toward the clubhouse with the first 200 yards across a quarry; to the left is continually out of bounds, and once you have reached the fairway, it slopes decidedly toward the out of bounds line.

The only changes in the course, other than numbering, occurred in the early 1920s when Ardmore Avenue, previously a country lane, became more heavily trafficked. Holes 2, 10, 11 and 12 had previously played across Ardmore Avenue but then had to be altered to put greens and tees on the same side of the street. Hole 13 soon had to be changed to further accommodate the street. It should be noted that the changes, and in fact any minor fine tuning, were done with the agreement of the courses' designer Hugh Wilson who never ceased working to perfect the courses.

Less than half a mile away, the West Course has a much different terrain. More nearly rectangular, the 126.2 acres are hilly and wooded. With natural obstacles increased, sand traps are reduced to fifty-six, half the number for the East Course. While the East Course represents the evolution of its architect's plans, the West Course is barely changed from its original concept. Only one hole has been altered: the 13th, which c. 1960 had its tee moved further back to form a bent fairway. Drainage problems in 1964 caused a stream on the periphery of the course to be dammed up, creating a pond alongside the fairway of the 7th hole. During the 1980s a sod bed was put down between the 9th and 14th fairways and 1,200 trees were planted in two nurseries between holes 12 and 13, but neither addition affects the line of play.

Golfers consciously evaluate most courses on the lie, the fairways and the greens. Golfers and non-golfers at Merion are struck by the qualities brought to these courses through careful planning and the process of aging. The courses are naturally defined by very old trees.

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The fairways are punctuated by mature specimen trees. Bunkers are planted with clumps of pampas grass and often surrounded with scotch broom. The greens are identified by woven reed baskets instead of flags; the baskets sit on top of striped poles adding an air of antiquity.

As is often the case with older clubs, the buildings that support the courses evolved as demand and need dictated. The East Course is the focus of the Club and as such, it is the East or Colonial Revival style main clubhouse that has changed from time to time. In the beginning the expanded stucco farmhouse (built in 1824) was the clubhouse and the adjacent barn was a storage building. The two buildings were connected by locker rooms and dining areas in 1948 and the barn has been converted to a generous pro shop. During the evolution the simplicity of the original farmhouse has been used as the design basis but with some movement toward a grander and more stately primary building. The two story columns on the course side, and the porches, verandas, and mass are elements which convey the importance of this building. Continuity has been consciously achieved through color (white and black) and details such as dormers, shutters, doors, and windows. The clubhouse masks its size by facing the course with two stories plus dormers and facing the service and parking areas with three stories plus dormers. Characteristic of the surrounding homes, the clubhouse is made up of a series of connected elements. Generally it is a rambling, quiet building gently sitting among towering white pines at the edge of the course. The course side is clearly the front and the parking side is clearly the back. Noncontributing buildings on the East Course are three screened maintenance buildings and a stone toilet building. The open storage shed was built in the 1940s, the cement block maintenance building was constructed in the 1950s, and the steel and aluminum maintenance building was erected in the 1960s. The toilet building was constructed after 1940.

Rather surprisingly, the West Course Clubhouse is a log structure in the form of a Greek cross. The reason for this departure from contextual design is not known. The terrain does suggest a less formal, more rugged design solution, however. Noncontributing buildings on this course are the maintenance building, a storage building for golf carts, and a stone toilet building. The maintenance building and stone toilet building were built in the 1960s. The storage building was erected after 1940. Due to their age, these seven maintenance, storage, and service buildings are non-contributing; however, they have little affect on the overall historic integrity of both the East and West Courses.

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1912 and two days later the new course and its golf house were opened. Membership quickly soared so that in the next year 122 acres nearby (later expanded to 126.2) were bought for the West Course, which opened on May 30, 1914. Between the two courses sits a residential area that the club has never owned. Due to the specialized nature and costs of the game, the golf facilities in 1942 broke away from its parent Merion Cricket Club to become an independent organization.

Golf courses in the beginning were not so much designed as laid out over existing terrain. Since the game originated along the Scottish shoreline, play was subject to an abundance of obstacles wherever they happened to occur. To get the ball from tee to cup, the golfer was required to follow one mandatory path from which the course would punish any variation. When golf arrived in the United States, course designers thought themselves bound to duplicate such impediments, often by bizarre means such as erecting stone walls across fairways.

The earliest form of golf architecture in which all but the most accurate golfer was hampered has come to be called "penal" design. At the opposite end of Pennsylvania, a famous example is the Oakmont Country Club, which Henry C. Fownes laid out in Pittsburgh in 1901. While golfers in Britain might consider such difficulties the essential "rub of the green," the American sense of equality was soon rubbed the wrong way by courses impossible for the average golfer. The first attempt at a compromise was the National Golf Links, designed by Charles Blair MacDonald for Southampton, Long Island in 1907. A serious effort was made by MacDonald to provide a direct but difficult path to the green and also an alternate path requiring more strokes but fewer hazards. The terms "penal" for the difficult route and "strategic" for the alternate route were later brought into usage by Trent Jones. These descriptive terms are not absolute and seem to be used with some variation in meaning. MacDonald's idea had impact and other course designers including Merion's Wilson were influenced by his experience. Due to the time that Merion East was constructed, this course combines the elements of penal and strategic. The golf activities were still a part of the Merion Cricket Club and there was pressure from the club players to have their new course playable for them. At the same time Wilson's travels had exposed him to the possibilities of designing a course continually challenging. The result was one of the first courses designed to accommodate the club players and those more expert. The course's popularity with premier golfers would indicate that Wilson's final layout tipped the scales to favor a penal design, but throughout the course there are concessions made to club players. For example, the 18th hole provides a tee situated to allow a less adventurous golfer to reach the far side of the quarry with something less than a 220 yard drive.

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A round of golf at Merion East, from secluded tee to isolated green, from sculptured bunker to quiet water hazard, is an intensely satisfying mental exercise. "Merion is a classic example," states the World Atlas of Golf, "of a course that encourages attack but rewards only those with the skill to hold its fairways and strike the ball truly from them--as well as the nerve to putt greens that are swift as ice." The designer of both the East and West courses was Hugh Irvine Wilson (1879-1925). At the time he was chairman of Merion Golf Course Design Committee. In his developing years Wilson was Captain of the golf team at Princeton from which he graduated in 1902. He then entered the insurance business, yet reserved much of his time for the game. Wilson would remain an amateur at golf architecture, but then many of the most celebrated courses such as Pebble Beach or the Augusta National have been the work of amateurs, able to lavish time on their design until it became special. Wilson was an important designer at a pivotal time, and evidence of his influence is that golf authority Herbert Warren Wind considered Wilson "quite possibly the finest golf architect ever produced in this country." Preparing for Merion, Wilson undertook a seven-month journey to Scotland and England in 1911 to study their fabled links. Influence of his travels is clearly seen in the 3rd hole based on the 15th, the reknowned Redan, at North Berwick or the considerable depression before the 17th green taken from the Valley of Sin on the 18th at St. Andrews. Peculiar to the East Course greens are the flagstaffs topped by wicker baskets shaped like inverted pears, an idea brought home from the Sunningdale Golf Links outside London. The bunkers, nicknamed "the white faces of Merion" for their glaring sand, were reduced to 116, a high number nowadays although few compared with, for instance, the 280 at Oakmont. Likewise in the spirit of fair play, blind holes were traps could not be seen were eliminated. At just over 130 acres, the layout is small, especially considering that modern-day courses average about twice that amount. "Merion is a perfect example," according to Jack Nicklaus, "that a golf course does not have to be long to be a great test of golf."

For all its pivotal position in golf architecture and the quaint charm of its design, what makes Merion stand out among American golf courses is quality, indefinable on paper yet unmistakable to the cultivated player. "What this fine course tells us today," Arnold Palmer writes, "is that touch and control are as important as power in golf, although the combination is unbeatable." It takes brains to play Merion. One cannot just slug away off the tees, for each fairway has a little twist to it, if not a sharp dogleg. The greens are wonderfully varied, fast and filled with subtle breaks. Golf literature has produced any number of polls which seek to determine which course is best and Merion never fails to finish in the top few. "Most serious students of golf, if asked to name the two best courses in the country," concludes Wind, "would, I think, settle on Merion and Pebble Beach." Additional

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substantiation that Merion has consistently been one of the best is that this is the only course with as many as fourteen national championships. By 1992 the only major tournament remaining to be held at Merion will be the Walker Cup.

Until his final days, Wilson continued to make subtle improvements in his masterpiece. It cannot be overemphasized that any significant changes made since the original design were either by him or according to plans he left behind.

Suffering only by comparison with its famous partner, the West Course is the second course designed by Hugh I. Wilson. Considering that a mere half-mile separates the two courses, the terrain varies substantially. Natural hazards increase so that the number of bunkers could be more than halved to fifty-six. With eighteen holes totaling 5,989 yards, the West Course is even shorter than its companion though not necessarily easier. Due to the crowded landscape, Wilson reverted to a more penal design, leaving little tolerance for misdirected shots. While he kept adjusting the East Course, the rigid setting of the West Course leaves little room for changes, so that the course remains virtually as Wilson first laid it out, except for the 13th hole, whose tee was moved around 1960 to bend the fairway. As with the East Course, the West is immaculately kept at all times.

Wilson's preoccupation as a golf architect was his ongoing perfection of the East Course. Besides the West Course, the only other course wholly of his own devising is the Cobbs Creek Municipal Golf Course in Fairmount Park, just inside the city limits of Philadelphia. Receiving poorer maintenance and rougher handling than at an exclusive club, a public course must serve golfers of widely differing capability. Designed in 1916, Cobbs Creek faces these difficulties squarely by providing eighteen straightforward holes that make clear the called-for approach. Amazingly the course is nevertheless endowed with variety sufficient to test all aspects of a player's performance. Dramatic settings rarely found on public courses show how Merion remained in the architect's mind; for example, one vista with the tee on a bluff high above the green far off below is reminiscent of the 18th hole on the East Course. What this course proves about Wilson is that he could turn out not elegant links alone, but courses no matter the requirement.

Fittingly his final project involved another course that consistently ranks high on lists of America's best. Located in Clementon on the New Jersey side of Philadelphia, Pine Valley Golf Club was begun by another amateur, hotel executive George Crump, who at his death in 1918 left four of the eighteen holes unfinished, so that Wilson during that same year was called in to complete holes 12 through 15. Commonly

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agreed to be the toughest course in the world, Pine Valley lacks fairways, roughs, chipping surfaces, but is in effect one huge 184-acre bunker. By its nature a penal course to say the least, the sand-laden layout would receive four holes devilishly difficult where any stray shot spells disaster. Although best remembered for helping lead golf into the modern era of strategic design with the East Course at Merion, Wilson showed by his work at Pine Valley that he could also take the old penal design to new heights. Taking on no further courses up to its optimum.

While both courses at Merion are used primarily by club members, the East Course in particular makes a first-rate setting for championships. Local tournaments in the course's first quarter century included frequently the Women's Interclub and the Philadelphia Junior, which in fact was inaugurated at Merion in 1914. On the state level, the Pennsylvania Open was held there in 1933. Nationally the most important of all golf tournaments is the U.S. Open, producing memorable rounds every time it has been played at Merion, starting in 1934 when won by Olin Dutra. A number of Merion members such as Max Marston, Davidson Herron, and Meredith M. "Beau" Jack have gained renown as amateur golfers during the period of significance, while Nonna Neviris Barlow remains one of the best known women amateurs of that era. Virtually every important golfer, amateur or professional, since the time of its opening has played Merion, often in contests vital to their careers. Possibly the most legendary of American golfers was Robert Tyre Jones, who made history in each of his three U.S. Amateurs there. In 1916 the fourteen year old wonder first played before a sizable gallery; in 1924 he won the tournament for the first time; in 1930 he last played in competition when he won golf's Grand Slam on the 11th hole of the East Course during the U.S. Amateur Championship. A bronze plaque on a water fountain celebrates his victory.

During his fifty-two years as groundskeeper, Joseph Valentine (1887-1966) kept the courses as if a tournament was always to start there the next morning. In 1919 he persuaded the Pennsylvania State University to offer the first curriculum in the nation for groundskeepers. During the 1930s he discovered behind the 17th tee on the East Course the original patch of Merion bluegrass, a hardy, heat resistant strain of Kentucky bluegrass that has become one of the most popular American grasses for not only fairways but also home lawns. Penn State commemorates his pioneering agronomy with its Joseph Valentine Turfgrass Research Center. Even the grass assures the club its prominent place in the history of American golf.

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UTMs (continued)

E E473710 N4427250
F E472680 N4426750
G E472500 N4426900
H E471830 N4426980
I E470870 N4426040
J E471440 N4426040
K E472040 N4426690

Boundary Description

The East Course of the Merion Golf Club is an L-shaped property of 130.6 acres, beginning at a point on the south edge of Ardmore Avenue (which intersects the course) directly across Ardmore Avenue from the northeast corner of the intersection of Ardmore Avenue and Golf House Road, then north across Ardmore Avenue and along the east edge of Golf House Road to the rear property line of residences along the south edge of College Avenue, then northeast along this line to the west bank of Cobbs Creek, then south along this bank to a point east of the clubhouse where the stream bends sharply east, then northeast from this point in a straight line to the west boundary of the right of way of the SEPTA commuter rail line between Philadelphia and Norristown, then south along this boundary to the rear property line of residences along the north edge of Golf View Road, then southwest along this rear property line to the northeast edge of Darby Road, then northwest along this edge to the rear property line of residences along the south edge of Ardmore Avenue, then northeast along this line to the termination of these properties, then northwest to the south edge of Ardmore Avenue, then northeast along this edge to the place of beginning.

The West Course occupies a 126.2 acre property more nearly rectangular, beginning where the west edge of Merrybrook Drive meets the north edge of Ellis Road, then west along the edge of Ellis Road to the rear property line of private lots along the north edge of Castle Rock Road, then west along this curved line that is continued by the rear property line of lots along Darby Creek Road to the rear property lines of lots along the south edge of Marple Road, then east along this curving line to the termination of these properties, then north to the south edge of Marple Road, then east along this edge in a straight line continuing to a point that would lie along the west edge of an extension of Merrybrook Drive, then south along this boundary to the place of beginning.

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Boundary Justification

The boundaries include all land that has been owned by the Merion Golf Club and that has been historically associated with the East and West Courses since 1911-1912, when the first (East) course was built. The two courses are nominated as a discontiguous district because the land between the two courses was neither owned by the Merion Golf Club or directly associated with the East and West courses. The land between the East and West courses consists of public streets and private houses that are not in keeping with the appearance or significance of the East and West courses.

EAST-COURSE
MERION-CRICKET-CLUB
ARDMORE - PA.



Toilet Building
(INC)

117

10

2

2

6

10
V

14

15

16

16

16

Maintenance
Building
(INC)

East Course
Clubhouse

Maintenance
Buildings
(INC)

Merion Golf Club
Delaware County
INC Noncontributing
Photo View

— Boundary

97

