

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic John James Audubon House

and or common Mill Grove

2. Location

street & number Pawling Road _____ not for publication

city, town Audubon _____ vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code _____ county Montgomery 19407 code

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Wildlife Sanctuary

4. Owner of Property

name Commissioners of Montgomery County

street & number Montgomery County Court House, Swede and Airy Streets

city, town Norristown _____ vicinity of state Pennsylvania 19401

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds, Montgomery County Court House

street & number Swede and Airy Streets

city, town Norristown _____ state Pennsylvania 19401

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Delaware Valley Historic Site Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1970 _____ federal _____ state county _____ local

depository for survey records Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, 1314 Filbert Street

city, town Philadelphia _____ state Pennsylvania 19107

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Title: National Register of Historic Places

no

Date: 1971 State

Depository for Survey Records: National Register of Historic Places, 1100 L Street, NW

City: Washington State: DC 20013-7127

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Mill Grove, John James Audubon's home in 1804-08, is a 2-1/2-story house of native fieldstone, with a 2-story west addition of the same material set on a lower level. The structure sits on a rise of land overlooking Perkiomen Creek.

There are inside end chimneys in the wood-shingled roof of the main block and at the west end of the addition. The roofline of the main block is pierced by three gables on the north elevation and two on the south, or creek, side. The cornice is coved with pent across the gable ends.

The main portion of Mill Grove was built by James Morgan, who operated a mill and a lead mine in the vicinity, in 1762. He also erected the west addition, 3 years later, apparently as an inn to shelter travelers stranded at the crossing of the Perkiomen near his home.¹ The dormers and porches were added after 1830.² With those exceptions, the house's exterior appearance is apparently the same as when Audubon knew it.

The north facade features a central entrance with a small window cut over it and 4-over-4 sash on both levels to either side. The south facade has 4-over-4 sash on both levels except in the central bay of the 5, on the first level, which contains the main south door. Many of the windows contain the original wavy glass.

The structure's interior integrity is also high. The main block is laid out on a center hall plan. All the floors, except those on the first level, are original and are composed of random width oak and pine. Those on the first level were replaced in the early 1950s, using similar random width native pine more than 100 years old. Nearly all first and second floor rooms, and those in the basement, feature fireplaces set on a 45 degree angle to the true square of the rooms. The only other interior changes of note are the sealing of fireplaces to meet insurance requirements and the closing of one or two doorways to meet public traffic flow regulations.

The wing contains a large room on the first floor, which was licensed as a tavern in the house's early years, and upstairs rooms.

Mill Grove serves as a museum, housing a priceless collection of Audubon's bird paintings, including a complete set of the rare "elephant folios." Several pieces of his furniture have been donated to Mill Grove, and are on display, along with period pieces. An upstairs bedroom has been furnished approximately as it may have been when Audubon had his studio in the house. Murals, in several of the rooms, by George M. Harding, were painted in the 1950s; they illustrate Audubon's travels and adventures in America.

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Of other structures that may have been on the grounds during Audubon's residence, only the barn has survived. The entire Mill Grove tract (130 acres) today forms a bird, animal, and plant sanctuary. The property is kept in a natural state, except for small formal gardens and lawns adjacent to the house, and some 6 miles of trails. The flora and fauna found in the sanctuary are quite diverse. Some 180 species of birds have been observed.

Footnotes

1

Edward S. Hocker, "Up and Down Montgomery County," A-8, 15, p. 18. (Scrapbook in the collections of the Montgomery County Historical Society.)

2

The only depiction of the house in the early 19th century is Thomas Birch's oil painting of 1830 in the New York Historical Society Museum, which is reproduced with this study. It clearly shows the absence of both the dormers and the Victorian porch, which were added by the Wetherill family long after Audubon had departed. The basic form of the house is clearly the same today as when Birch painted it.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric		community planning	landscape architecture	religion
1400-1499	archeology-historic	X	conservation	law	X science
1500-1599	agriculture		economics	literature	sculpture
1600-1699	architecture		education	military	social
1700-1799	X art		engineering	music	humanitarian
X 1800-1899	commerce		exploration settlement	philosophy	theater
1900-	communications		industry	politics government	transportation
			invention		X other (specify)
					Recreation
Specific dates	1762; 1765		Builder Architect	James Morgan	(Birdwatching)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

Somewhat like the birds he watched, shot, mounted, and painted, John James Audubon is associated with no single location in America. This comfortable farm house in rural Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, was his first home in the United States, in 1804-08. Although his stay here was brief, it was highly significant. Mill Grove is "... historic for its lasting stimulus to Audubon's ... life and achievements."¹

At Mill Grove, Audubon made his earliest observations of the "birds of America"; conducted his experiments in bird-banding, the first in the United States; devised his methods of taxidermy; and painted artistic renderings of his wildlife subjects.² Mill Grove is thus an important site in science and art, and significant in the history of conservation for the movement that sprang from it.

Moreover, it strikingly illustrates the potential significance of an avocation that becomes a passion and then a profession, for Audubon is the prototype and patron saint of America's 20 million birdwatchers. And Mill Grove and the land around it supplied his budding genius with material for inspiration and scientific inquiry.

In addition, although it was his father's property, Mill Grove is the only surviving Audubon home in America. The only house in America that he owned in his own name was "Minniesland," a house he built in New York City in 1841. He died there in 1851. The house was razed early in the 20th century.

History

Audubon's father Jean, a French naval lieutenant, served in the fleet supporting Washington at Yorktown and was, in the 1780s, engaged in trade in the West Indies.³ During a sojourn in Haiti, he fathered Jean Jacques, who eventually returned to France with him. The boy got a gentleman's upbringing, but balked at entering the Navy. He studied art with Jacques Louis David, and, at 15, had begun a collection of his own drawings of French birds. At 18, perhaps to avoid Napoleon's draft, his father sent him to the United States.

A refuge was waiting for him -- Mill Grove. The elder Audubon had purchased Mill Grove while on a trading voyage in Philadelphia in 1789. Although he may have acquired the estate as a potential refuge for himself -- slave insurrections were sweeping Haiti and the French Revolution was beginning -- he had never resided there. Nantes, France, remained his home when not at sea or in the West Indies.

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The house at Mill Grove had been built in 1762-65 by James Morgan, who operated a mill nearby on Perkiomen Creek. Because the property contained a mine that produced lead, copper, and zinc, and was close to Valley Forge, it had been looted during the American Revolution, although the house escaped essentially unscathed.⁴

In March 1804, Jean Jacques (whose name was quickly anglicized to John James) arrived at Mill Grove. He was supposed to develop the mine on the property for his father; however, he fell under the lure of the Pennsylvania countryside. He roamed the wooded hills along the Perkiomen and the Schuylkill and pursued hunting, taxidermy, and painting. He was intensely interested in studying the area's wild-life, particularly its birds.

He was a prodigious collector of nests, eggs, and avian specimens, which he faithfully sketched in life-like attitudes after first arranging his subjects for the sittings by means of wires thrust through the carcasses and then bent and twisted to hold them in the desired positions. This method of arranging the specimens was his own invention. Here, Audubon also performed the first authentic experiments in bird banding in America. He banded a species of flycatcher, the phoebe, succeeding generations of which still nest at Mill Grove. During his stay, Audubon also became acquainted with Lucy Bakewell, daughter of the owner of a neighboring farm, and became engaged to her.

Audubon actually spent less than 2 full years of his life at Mill Grove. He returned temporarily to France in 1805, worked in the office of his fiancée's uncle in New York City from the autumn of 1806 until August 1807, and opened a general store in Louisville, Ky., later in the latter year. In 1808, he went back to Mill Grove to marry Lucy, but quickly set out for Kentucky with her.

During the Audubons' peripatetic life -- they lived in New York, Ohio, Kentucky, Missouri, and Louisiana, in addition to Pennsylvania, and he traveled through Texas, Mississippi, Arkansas, Illinois, Tennessee, Florida, Maine, the Carolinas, and much of the rest of the Nation -- Lucy played an indispensable role. She saw him through two decades of poverty, failure in business, and his struggle to establish himself as a nature artist. Her earnings as a schoolteacher often supported the family, and she financed his trip to Britain that finally led to the publication of his work, beginning in 1826.

During Audubon's stay at Mill Grove, another Frenchman -- albeit with a Portuguese surname -- François (Francis) DaCosta, had served as his guardian and partner in the mining operation. DaCosta was also assigned a half-interest in the property. When the Audubons left for Kentucky in 1808, DaCosta acquired full ownership of Mill Grove.

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property 130 acres

Quadrangle name Collegetown and Valley Forge

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	8	4	6	1	9	3	1	0	4	4	4	2	4	9	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing									

B

1	8	4	6	2	9	2	1	0	4	4	4	2	4	9	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing									

C

1	8	4	6	2	9	2	1	0	4	4	4	0	9	6	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing									

D

1	8	4	6	1	9	3	1	0	4	4	4	0	9	6	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing									

E

Zone			Easting				Northing									

F

Zone			Easting				Northing									

G

Zone			Easting				Northing									

H

Zone			Easting				Northing									

Verbal boundary description and justification

The track acquired by Montgomery County from Herbert Wetherill in 1951, as indicated on attached map.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James H. Charleton, Historian

organization History Division, National Park Service date June 6, 1985

street & number 1100 L Street, NW telephone (202) 343-8165

city or town Washington state DC 20013-7127

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title _____ date _____

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date _____

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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