

PH0073261

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Delaware	
COUNTY: New Castle	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	DEC 4 1974

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
Laurel

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
Laurel by Frank Lloyd Wright

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
619 Shipley Road

CITY OR TOWN:  
Wilmington

STATE: Delaware	CODE: 10	COUNTY: New Castle	CODE: 003
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**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
Dudley W. Spencer

STREET AND NUMBER:  
619 Shipley Road

CITY OR TOWN:  
Wilmington

STATE: Delaware	CODE: 10
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**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Public Building

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Rodney Square

CITY OR TOWN:  
Wilmington

STATE: Delaware	CODE: 10
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**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY:  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE:	CODE:
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SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:  
COUNTY:  
ENTRY NUMBER  
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**7. DESCRIPTION**

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Laurel, designed in 1956 by Frank Lloyd Wright and built over a period of five years by its owner, Dudley W. Spencer, embodies in its emphasis on geometric forms (in this case the rectangle and the ellipse), the culminating design ideas of Wright as an architect.

The basic shape of the house is an ellipse with rectangular wings, one on the end of the ellipse and one on its side. Except for the wing on the side of the ellipse, the house is all on one level. The plan follows the general pattern of Wright's designs in that the main portion of the house is devoted to living, dining, and general work (kitchen) functions, all contained in one open area. The hearth is the dominant feature of the house both structurally and aesthetically; structurally in that it serves as a support for a twelve-inch-thick steel beam that supports the main weight of the roof, and aesthetically in that it is the focus of the entire house, being almost centrally located. Two bedrooms with an adjoining bath are located in the extremity of the ellipse, while the remaining rectangular areas contain an informal living area. A utility core serves the purpose normally assigned to the basement of a house, containing the heating system as well as a laundry and utility room. Built-in furniture designed by Wright and decorated with a motif used on the eaves of the house provides storage space (under the hinged seats).

The plan is particularly humanistic, both in its regard for the life style of the occupants as well as for their privacy. The plan is informal in its use of materials (fieldstone from the nearby Avondale quarry and the more distant Cumberland ridge in Tennessee, and Honduras mahogany being the principal materials), and extremely sensitive to the need for privacy (in its use of solid fieldstone walls with only clerestory windows facing the road and wide open expanses of glass facing the private woods and nearby, flowing creek). Visual monotony is discouraged by the subtle placement of light and dark areas, projections and recessions, curves and angles, and the repetition of architectural elements.

While the interior can be said for all practical purposes to be on a single level, the same cannot be said for the exterior of the house. The sloping site creates a series of terraces which lend interest to the house. These various levels are further developed in the roof of the house, so that even though the floor is on one level, the rooms vary in height and degree of intimacy solely through ceiling height variation. Wright's wish to integrate the house with its surroundings is wonderfully expressed by the inclusion of planting areas that extend through the concrete pad to the sub-soil directly under the house, both on the porch and in the house itself. The exterior as well as the interior appears to be made solely of wood and stone. However, imbedded in them are beams of steel which actually provide most of the support for the roof and cantilevered overhangs.

The house has undergone no alterations since its original building, but portions of the house were altered from the plan by the owner/builder, Mr. Spencer, during the period of construction. Instead of following the architect's specifications of five-and-one-half inches of crushed stone

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(Continuation Sheet)

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COUNTY	
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(Number all entries)

7. DESCRIPTION (continued)---

beneath the concrete pad that forms the base of the house, Mr. Spencer included a full twelve inches; and in place of a three-and-one-half-inch pad, he used four inches of concrete throughout. The load-bearing stone walls were altered as well, being composed of eight inches of stone, four inches of insulation, and another eight inches of stone, instead of Wright's specification for only two inches of insulation. The house also had to be moved fourteen feet up the slope away from the creek when it was found that the creek's flood level was higher than expected.

The house is heated by a system of wrought-iron pipes imbedded in the concrete pad(wrought iron having the same coefficient of expansion as concrete.) Windows are of the casement type with the screens located inside the house.



**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |                                       |  |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |  |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1956 (final design date)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                             |  | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |  |  | _____                                    |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This house, designed in 1956, is one of the late designs of Frank Lloyd Wright and embodies some of his final ideas on "organic architecture"; ideas which he continued to develop until his death in 1959.

The design is an example of that innovative plan conceived by Wright early in the century and first used in the Glasner house in 1905. As an example of the most effective and sympathetic use of space for the American home, Henry-Russell Hitchcock states: "not only are the living room and the dining room completely unified, but the kitchen - now re-christened 'work space' - opens into the main living area behind a range of glazed shelves. More than twenty years later the full implications of this development are still not quite digested in America or even fully apprehended abroad."

Finally, the building is significant as the only structure designed by Wright in the State of Delaware.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Frank Lloyd Wright, Writings and Buildings, selected by Edgar Kaufmann and Ben Raeburn, Cleveland, Ohio, 1965.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "		39°	46'	27"
NE	° ' "	° ' "		75°	31'	02"
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: /

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
Mr. Richard Schmidt

ORGANIZATION: Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs      DATE: 7/19/72

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Hall of Records

CITY OR TOWN: Dover      STATE: Delaware      CODE: 10

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name: S. Berkeley Tompkins  
Dr. F. Berkeley Tompkins  
Title: Director, Div. of Historical and Cultural Affairs  
Date: 8-24-72

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

R. R. Werten  
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 12/4/74

ATTEST:  
George Fowery  
Keeper of The National Register  
Date: Dec. 3, 1974

N5  
11/17

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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

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

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Laurel N-571

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Interview with Dudley Spencer, builder and owner of Laurel, August 11, 1983.

New Castle County Land Records. Deed Book F, Volume 106, Page 237.

Wright, Frank Lloyd. Blueprints of plans for Laurel, in possession of owner.

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

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

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date entered

Continuation sheet

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Laurel N-571

**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage - 6.71 acres

Quadrangle - Wilmington North, Del.-Pa.

Quadrangle scale - 1:24000

UTM Reference - 18/455710/4402580

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated area encompasses two adjacent legal parcels totaling 6.71 acres. The two parcels are designated by a bold black line on the attached sketch map which is labeled 1983 New Castle County, Delaware Property Map.

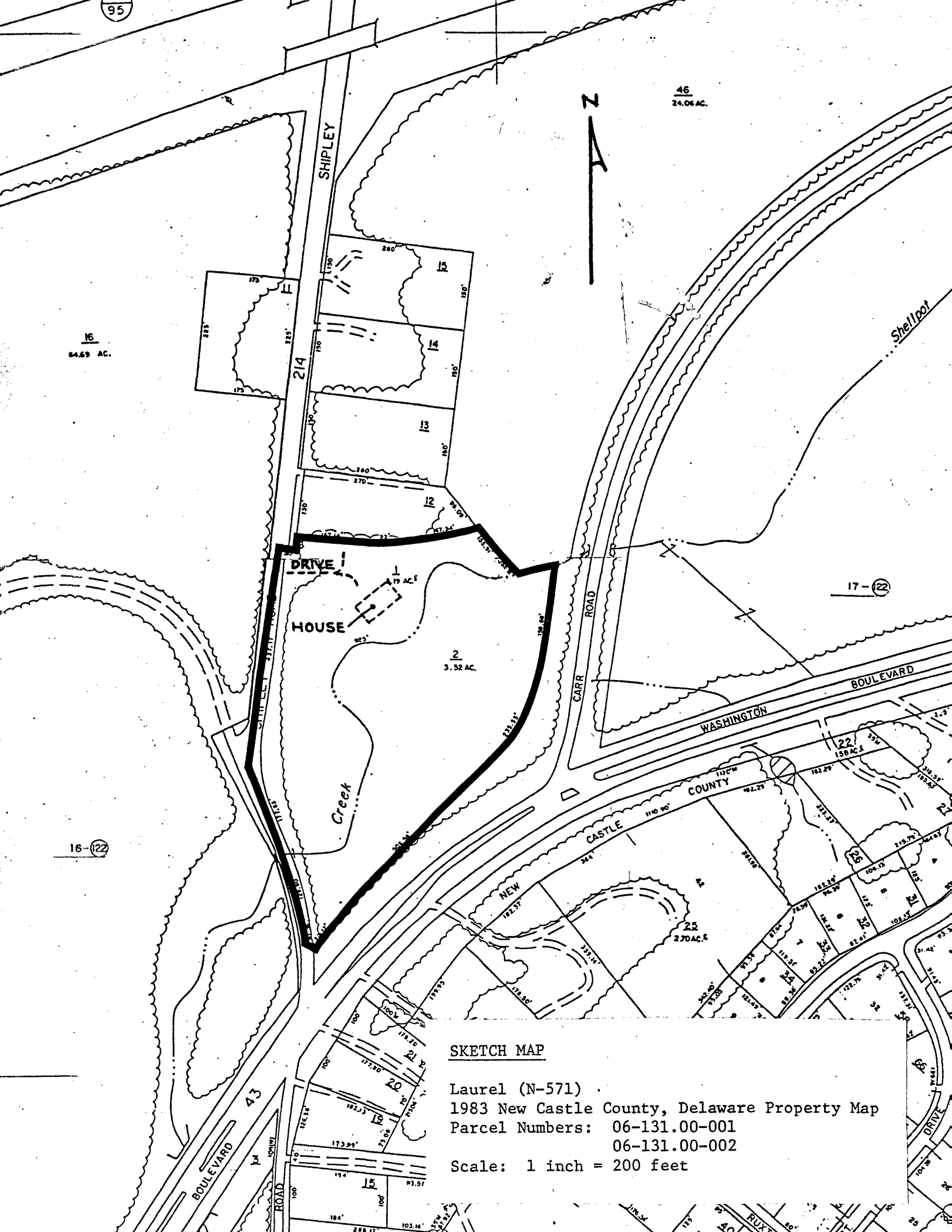
Justification of Boundaries

In defining the boundaries for Laurel it is important to understand that the house was designed for the particular parcel and landscape on which it stands. Dudley Spencer, the builder and owner of Laurel, drew a topographical plan of parcel number one and built a scale model of it which he delivered to Frank Lloyd Wright's studio. Wright's plans clearly indicate that the terrain, the existing trees, the configuration of Shellpot Creek which forms the southeast boundary of the parcel, and the vistas beyond Spencer's legal parcel were all taken into account in designing the house. Although Mr. Spencer did not own parcel number two at the time the house was designed, the house was situated with the undeveloped woodlands of parcel number two in mind. It was mistakenly thought that parcel number two was part of the adjacent Bringham Woods which was, and still is, kept as a natural wooded area by the City of Wilmington and the County Parks Department. One of Wright's drawings depicts the southeastern side of the house in relation to its landscape with a vantage point from parcel number two; it is labeled as the view from this supposed parkland. Clearly, Wright considered the vista to and from this natural area in designing and siting Laurel. It was not until several years later that Mr. Spencer learned parcel number two was privately held. He purchased the property in 1979 and has retained it as undeveloped woodland.

Since the design of the building is so closely related to the landscape, and since both parcels had an impact on the design of the house, the entire 6.71 acres that compose parcel number one and parcel number two are being included within the boundaries of the site.

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Prepared by:  
Valerie Cesna  
New Castle County Department of Planning  
January 19, 1984

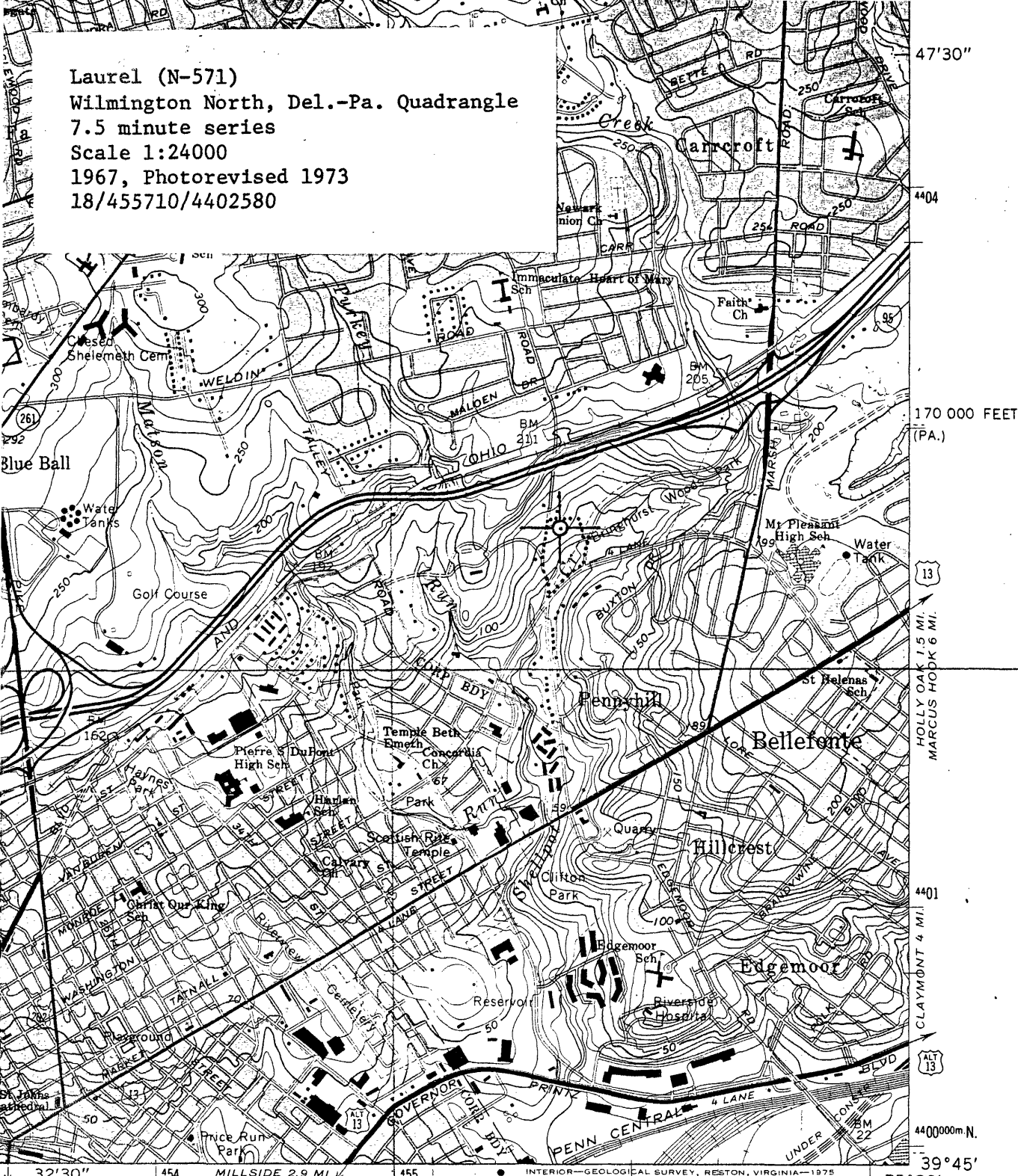


SKETCH MAP

Laurel (N-571)  
 1983 New Castle County, Delaware Property Map  
 Parcel Numbers: 06-131.00-001  
                           06-131.00-002  
 Scale: 1 inch = 200 feet



Laurel (N-571)  
 Wilmington North, Del.-Pa. Quadrangle  
 7.5 minute series  
 Scale 1:24000  
 1967, Photorevised 1973  
 18/455710/4402580



47'30"  
 4404  
 170 000 FEET (PA.)  
 13  
 HOLLY OAK 1.5 MI.  
 MARCUS HOOK 6 MI.  
 4401  
 CLAYMONT 4 MI.  
 4400000m N.  
 39°45'  
 457000m E.

32'30" 454 MILLSIDE 2.9 MI. 455 INTERIOR-GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA-1975 2 630 000 FEET (PA.) 457000m E. 75°30'

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

- Heavy-duty ——— Light-duty ———
- Medium-duty ——— Unimproved dirt - - - - -
- Interstate Route    ◡ U. S. Route    ○ State Route

(PENNS GROVE)  
 5963 III NW

WILMINGTON NORTH, DEL. - PA.

N3945—W7530/7.5

1967  
 PHOTOREVISED 1973  
 AMS 5863 I SE—SERIES V832

Revisions shown in purple compiled in cooperation with State of Pennsylvania agencies from aerial photographs taken 1973. This information not field checked  
 Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

QUADRANGLE LOCATION

