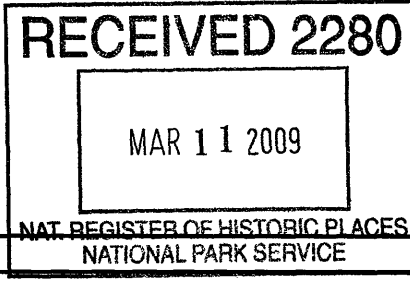


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

244



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name Wells, William E., House

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 372 Virginia Terrace not for publication N/A

city or town Newell vicinity N/A

state West Virginia code WV county Hancock code 029 zip code 26050

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Susan M. Pierce 3/5/09
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. 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): _____

Edson H. Beall 4.23.09
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property		
		Contributing	Noncontributing	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	3		buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district			sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	2		structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure			objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	5		Total

Name of related multiple property listing

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

none

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DOMESTIC/secondary structure

Current Functions

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DOMESTIC/secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification

LATE 19th & EARLY 20th CENTURY REVIVALS/

Colonial Revival

Materials

foundation STONE/sandstone

walls STONE/sandstone

roof STONE/slate; METAL

other WOOD; METAL

Narrative Description

Refer to Continuation Sheets

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.

Areas of Significance

ARCHITECTURE
INDUSTRY

Period of Significance

1907-1931; 1935

Significant Dates

1907; 1935

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
Wells, William E.

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Struthers, W. F., architect
Thayer, C. C. & A. L., architects

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance

Refer to Continuation Sheets

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

Refer to Continuation Sheets

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

Name of repository:

Wells, William E., House
Name of Property

Hancock County, WV
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acres of Property 5 acres

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	17	533660	4495900

Verbal Boundary Description Refer to Continuation Sheets

Boundary Justification Refer to Continuation Sheets

11. Form Prepared By

name/title David L. Taylor, Principal

organization Taylor & Taylor Associates, Inc. date November, 2008

street & number 9 Walnut Street telephone 814-849-4900

city or town Brookville state PA zip code 15825

Property Owner

name National Trust for Historic Preservation

street & number 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW telephone _____

city or town Washington state DC zip code 20036

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Wells, William E., House
Hancock County, WV

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7. Description

The William E. Wells House (Resource No. 1; Photos 1-21) is a 3-story Colonial Revival-style residence finished in locally-quarried¹ rock-faced ashlar sandstone, located in the small city of Newell (pop. 1,602), which is in the Grant District of Hancock County, West Virginia. Hancock is the northernmost county of West Virginia's Northern Panhandle and Newell lies on the east bank of the Ohio River, forty-two miles downstream from Pittsburgh and opposite the Ohio city of East Liverpool. The Wells House occupies a 5.4-acre tract atop a steep hill known as Newell Heights which overlooks Newell, the river, and East Liverpool, and is accessed by a winding road leading eastward and up the hill from downtown Newell. The house retains integrity and, except for the loss of a portico, has been minimally altered from its appearance following a major remodeling in 1934-1935 which saw the construction of a new diningroom addition.

The William E. Wells House occupies an undulating, landscaped 5.4-acre parcel atop a steep hillside and is accessed from Virginia Terrace by an asphalt-paved driveway. The placement of the driveway dates from the removal of an original portico which occurred in the course of the above-mentioned 1934-1935 remodeling. The driveway exits Virginia Terrace and passes between two stone entry portals (Resource No. 4) approximately three feet square, each of which is capped with a hexagonal metal lantern; the portals are counted collectively as a single contributing structure within the context of the nomination. After splitting to the south to access the two garages mentioned below (Resource Nos. 2 and 3), the driveway forms a loop immediately south of the house. The landscaped grounds incorporate mature pine, maple, buckeye, cherry, beech, and pin oak trees, along with various flower beds. In extremely close proximity to the house, particularly on the west side, are very large cedar trees whose scale and location make photography difficult. Leading to the house from the west is a stone sidewalk (Resource No. 5) which begins at Virginia Terrace with stone entry portals with pyramidal caps, followed by a terraced sidewalk with short stone side walls; this landscape element is also counted as a single contributing structure. Nearby are several other residential properties which date from the early decades of the twentieth century. One was built by the Harker family (also East Liverpool potters) and the remainder were built by other members of the Wells family. These are formally-designed residences executed in variants of the Colonial Revival style. The entire Virginia Terrace area appears eligible for the National Register as a residential historic district, although this nomination is associated only with the 1907 William E. Wells House, the first of the residences to be built here.

The following properties are associated with the nominated parcel:

1. Wells, William E., House, residential

Date: 1907; 1935

1 contributing building

Description:

¹Notes from a 2003 house tour to benefit the Hancock County Historical Museum. Part of the paper holdings acquired in 2007 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation when the house was left to the Trust by Robert M. Wells.

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Wells, William E., House
Hancock County, WV

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Exterior:

The William E. Wells House (Photo Nos. 1-20) is a substantial 3-story Colonial Revival-style residence, irregular in form, finished in ashlar sandstone. The house is oriented to the north, rests on a sandstone foundation, and is capped with a multiple-pitched roof of slate (Photos 1-5). A stone terrace (Photo 6) accessed by steps extends around a portion of the facade and is enclosed within a short stone railing. The facade incorporates a centered entryway on the first story (Photo 1), with French doors, a transom glazed in art glass, and a composite frontispiece. Originally, a full semi-circular wood portico shielded the entrance but it was removed in the 1980s due to insect infestation; its removal constitutes the single major change to the house since 1935. Centered on the second floor above the front entrance is a three-part window above which is a gable dormer at attic level with a stylized Palladian motif. On the L-shaped south elevation is a one-story shed-roofed porch, supported by plain round wood columns, which accesses the kitchen (Photo 2). In the angle of the ell on this same elevation is a one-story secondary entryway into the kitchen. The house is basically rectilinear in form but also incorporates two distinctive bow-front bays, a two-story bow-front bay, part of the diningroom on the first story and a bedroom above (Photo 5) and another at the end of the one-story 1935 livingroom addition (Photo 3). Most fenestration is flat-topped, including multi-light casement windows as well as double-hung wood sash, most of which incorporate one-over-one-light configurations (Photos 1-5). Polychrome art glass windows with transoms are found on the main stair, which is on the south elevation. Some rooms exhibit oversized windows with art glass transoms (Photo 4), one small oval window opens into one of the bedrooms, and the pediments of some gables are penetrated by semi-circular-arched attic-level windows with lancet-arched tracery in the upper sash (Photo 5). Some windows have been fitted with triple-track exterior storm sash. On the second story of the south elevation a single small non-historic opening incorporates an exterior window box (Photo 2). Tall ashlar sandstone chimneys penetrate the roof at several locations (Photos 2, 3, 5). Historic photos indicate that an additional chimney was removed in the course of the 1935 diningroom addition. The multiple-pitched roof (Photos 2, 3) is finished in slate and includes both gables and the main roof, an intersecting truncated hip-roofed structure which originally terminated in an open wood balustrade accessed by stairs from the third floor. Some portions of the soffits and fascia have been clad in non-historic materials but the original materials are visible beneath.

Interior, Basement

The basement of the Wells house is finished and contains rooms which are depicted on the original 1907 plans as a billiard room, a wine cellar, a boiler room, a fuel room, a fruit cellar, and a laundry. A single-run wood stair with a plain square newel and attenuated square balusters accesses the basement from the kitchen.

Cocktail Lounge One area of the basement is accessed by a stair from the main hallway on the first floor; it was remodeled between 1934 and 1935 from its original use as a billiard room into an Art Deco-style cocktail lounge (Photo 15), and is likely the work of architect W. F. Struthers, who designed the addition built at the same time. It is finished in black and red and incorporates a curvilinear bar, curved wall and ceiling surfaces, recessed lighting, built-in seating, and polished aluminum trim. Arthur Wells originally considered Carrara glass, a characteristic Art Deco-style material, to finish surfaces and much of the ceiling

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Wells, William E., House
Hancock County, WV

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his lounge but settled on Micarta.² Above the bar is inset a painting entitled "Gathering the Grapes." A second painting is inset into the end wall of the lounge; it is entitled "Tasting," and are attributed to Lillian Langseth-Christensen, a well-known author of cookbooks and other writings on a variety of cuisine-related issues.³

Interior, First Story

Stair Hall The first story of the Wells house is organized around a substantial entry hall, 43' × 10' (Photos 7, 8), running east-to-west and accessing the principal rooms on the first floor. The hall is floored in polychrome geometrical parquet, and features paneled oak wainscot with egg-and-dart molding, reeded pilasters, and a paneled beamed ceiling with crown molding, appearing to be mahogany. All wood surfaces are naturally finished. The original main entrance to the house is located at the north end of the hall, with a double door glazed in art glass and enframed within art glass sidelights and transom. At the south end of the hall is an imposing triple-run open-string stair leading to the second story (Photo 7). This stair is distinguished by a paneled wainscot, a delicate balustrade with attenuated turned balusters and a curved handrail, and newels which are capped with finials and incorporate applied classically-derived detail. A pair of single-hung windows with transoms open onto the stair; these windows are glazed with multi-colored art glass executed in floral motifs. A secondary entry to the hall accesses a small foyer floored in stone and featuring a smooth-dressed limestone arch (Photo 8) which leads to a single paneled wood door flanked by are glass sidelights and capped with a transom. This foyer also accesses a basement-level cocktail lounge and dates from the 1930s remodeling.

Diningroom The stair hall opens through a wide opening with pocket doors into a parquet-floored diningroom (Photos 9-11; Figs. 1, 2) which terminates in a bow-front bay (Photo 9) penetrated by curved wood sash with corresponding glass. Tall paneled wood wainscot and wood crown molding extend around the diningroom and a substantial built-in floor-to-ceiling mirrored china cupboard (Photo 10) occupies much of the east wall of the room. The china cupboard includes both flat and bow-front drawers and art glass in the upper doors. It retains its original brass pulls and is finished in delicate classically-derived ornament with a recessed semi-elliptical half shell centered above the storage areas. Beside the china cupboard is a paneled wood swinging door opening into a small hallway which accesses the kitchen. Opposite the china cupboard is a fireplace with a mahogany mantle, also finished with a profusion of classical trim.

Kitchen At the end of a narrow hall leading from the diningroom is the family kitchen, unremarkable architecturally, with an array of counter space and ceiling-height wood cupboards. An outside door leads from the kitchen to a side porch and inside doors access a pair of stairs, one of which leads to the basement and the other to the servant's quarters on the second story.

²*Ibid.* Note: Micarta is a composite material made of linen or paper fabric in a thermosetting plastic, originally used in electrical and decorative applications but also employed for counter tops and other domestic uses. Developed by Pittsburgher George Westinghouse ca. 1910, the Micarta for the Wells cocktail lounge came from the Pittsburgh-based Lamented Building Specialties Company, whose letterhead also noted, WESTINGHOUSE MICARTA FOR UTILITY AND DECORATION (letter dated April 9, 1935 from C. W. Hurley, Laminated Building Specialties Co. to Arthur E. Wells).

³*Ibid.*, although this attribution is unconfirmed.

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Wells, William E., House
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Livingroom The largest single room in the house is an elongated livingroom (Photos 11-12) which is opposite the stair hall from the diningroom and was the result of a 1934-1935 remodeling designed by architect William F. Struthers for Arthur A. Wells. The livingroom measures 35' × 18' and features side walls of coffered wood paneling and casement windows with leaded art glass. The wood is bleached Slovak oak, which was harvested in 1932 and was carved in place in 1934.⁴ The room incorporates a plaster ceiling with floral reliefwork around the border. The eastern end of this room is finished in smooth-dressed limestone and is penetrated by a flattened lancet arch terminating in a bow-front bay with floor-to-ceiling art glass casement windows. A fireplace with a fully-paneled overmantle is along one wall of the livingroom. In a flight of whimsy, some of the uppermost panels on the walls are inscribed with a variety of symbols which the Wells family held dear. Among these are dogs and horses, golf clubs, a musical motif incorporating drums and horns, an airplane, an oil derrick, an open book with the inscribed with 1923, the marriage date of Arthur and Roberta Wells, a paint palette and brushes, and a sack bearing a dollar sign. One of the panels also contains the date 1907, when the original house was built and also 1934, the date of construction of the room under the ownership of Arthur and Roberta Wells. Like the rest of the paneling, these elements were carved in place in the course of the 1934-1935 remodeling which involved the construction of this substantial room.⁵

Cabinet Room and Reception Room The livingroom opens through a flattened lancet-arched doorway of smooth-dressed limestone into a small room, 8' × 10', lined with glass-front shelved cases used for the storage and display of family items and collectibles. The ceiling of the cabinet room is of wood, with painted floral ornament and leaded glass double French doors open from this room onto the terrace. Connected to the display room is another smaller room, 15' × 14', known as the reception room. It is parquet-floored, with painted woodwork, concave crown molding, and a small fireplace at one end. A small powder room is in one corner, suggesting that the room may have been used as a ladies' lounge in the day of lavish Wells entertaining.

"Gentlemen's Room" Directly across the main hall from the reception room is another smaller room used originally as a gentlemen's smoking room and later as a library and in-home office (Photos 13, 14). It is parquet-floored and features a shallow concave crown molding which is finished to resemble mahogany and a smooth plaster ceiling with a plain border. The balance of the ceiling is painted with floral motifs, a Greek key, an egg-and-dart border, and allegorical figures embracing classical architecture, the muses, literature, and music; this ornamental painting dates from the 1930s (Photo 14)⁶. Original built-in mahogany corner bookcases with Art Nouveau-style leaded glass doors are in three corners of the room; the fourth corner contains a modest mahogany fireplace with a classical ornament, a semi-elliptical arched opening, a stone frontispiece, and a trapezoidal overmantel.

Interior, Second Story

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

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Upstairs Hall The upstairs hall (Photo 16) is carpeted and includes the upper stair balustrade as well as doors opening into the servants' quarters and the family bedrooms. Along a portion of the wall is a commodious storage area including drawers with original brass pulls, enclosed behind paneled oak doors. All woodwork is finished naturally.

Bedrooms The upstairs contains a series of five bedrooms, including interconnecting rooms identified on the architect's plans as being for William and Roberta Wells, a guest room, a room for the Wells' children, and a maid's room. The bedrooms incorporate built-in closets, and windows, baseboard and door trim are both painted and finished naturally. The bedroom walls are finished in wallpaper and painted and one, above the diningroom (Photo 17), has as its outside wall the upper story of the 2-story bow-front bay, and is penetrated both by double-hung sash and a single-hung art glass window. Fireplaces are in each of the bedrooms, with some mantels less ornamental than those found on the first story, although two bedrooms feature mantles of the Arts-and-Crafts (Photo 18) and French Provincial (Photo 19) styles. The bedroom with the Arts-and-Crafts-style mantel also features curtain rods terminating in stylized Medieval-style broadaxes. Bathrooms are accessed from the bedrooms.

Bathrooms The several upstairs bathrooms of the Wells house are finished in plaster and in decorative tile; the manufacturer of the time has not been identified. One of the bathrooms is penetrated by the aforementioned non-historic window-box opening, the only modification to the property's otherwise entirely intact fenestration.

Interior, Third Floor

According to the notes from the 2003 house tour mentioned above, the uppermost floor of the Wells House (Photo 20) was originally a ballroom, decorated to provide the appearance of an outdoor garden. It is accessed from a secondary hallway off the main hall on the second floor, from which leads an open-string stair with attenuated turned balusters. At the top of the stairs are storage rooms and a pair of double doors opening into the former ballroom. Originally one large open room, evidence near the center of the floor suggests the former presence of a stairway which may have accessed the open balustrade which once was on the truncated portion of the hipped roof. Some non-historic storage rooms have been built along portions of the outside walls, finished in non-historic wood paneling. Portions of the outside walls are painted in a picket fence scene, with trailing roses climbing the pickets. Window seats are built into the areas which open into the dormers which penetrate the roof line.

2. Garage, residential dependency

Date: c. 1920

Description: 1-story L-shaped garage of wood construction (Photo 21), built on a foundation of brick, and finished in weatherboard, with an intersecting hipped roof system and exposed rafter tails; workshop/storage area in the basement. The 1-car opening retains the original hinged garage doors, while that of the 2-car opening has a modern overhead door. A single door is between the garage doors. Flat-topped double-hung windows with diamond-pane upper sash. The second floor was destroyed by fire at an indeterminate time.

1 contributing building

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3. **Garage**, residential dependency

Date: c.1920

Description: 1-story 2-bay hip-roofed rectangular garage of wood construction 20' x 28' (Photo 21), finished in thin shiplap, with exposed curvilinear rafter tails; one 2-car opening and one 1-car opening, both of which have non-historic overhead garage doors.

1 contributing building

4. **Driveway Entry Portals**, landscape feature

Date: 1907

Description: Two stone entry portals at the entrance to the driveway from Virginia Terrace

1 contributing structure

5. **Stone Sidewalk , Portals, and Walls**

Date: 1907

Description: terraced stone sidewalk with entry portals and side walls which leads to the front of the house from Virginia Terrace, north of the house (Photo 1)

1 contributing structure

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8. Significance

The William E. Wells House is significant and meets National Register Criteria B and C. Under Criterion B, the property is significant for its association with William Edwin Wells who, with his son and grandson, were long affiliated with the ceramics industry and specifically with the ownership, management and prosperity of the Homer Laughlin Pottery Company, an association which continues to this day. The house was the home of three Wells family generations over a span of one hundred years, from the time of its original construction until the death of William E. Wells' grandson, Robert, in 2007. With respect to Criterion C, the property is significant for *architecture*, representing the Colonial Revival style as interpreted by New Castle, Pennsylvania architects Thayer and Thayer. Two Periods of Significance are associated with the property. The first begins in 1907, the date of construction of the house and ends in 1931 with the death of William E. Wells; the other is 1935, corresponding to the completion of a major remodeling of the property under the ownership of Arthur A. Wells, the son of the original owner and himself a leader in the ceramics industry, who occupied the house for decades after his father's death.

Overall Context

The nominated property is located in the city of Newell, an early twentieth-century community whose past is inextricably linked to that of the city of East Liverpool, Ohio. East Liverpool was first known as Fawcettown, after Thomas Fawcett, one of the area's earliest land owners. In 1800 Fawcett renamed the community "St. Clair," after Arthur St. Clair, who at that time was Governor of the Northwest Territory; it was incorporated under the name, East Liverpool, in 1834. James Bennett, an English potter, established the local pottery industry in the 1840s with the manufacture of yellow ware produced from the rich deposits of local clay. Others soon followed and the Ohio River became a critical transportation artery for the new industry, carrying the local products throughout the region and beyond. The pottery industry became the community's leading employer and led to its becoming known as "The Crockery City." Throughout the course of the community's renowned ceramics history, more than three hundred potteries were in East Liverpool and its immediate environs, which once produced more than one-half of the annual ceramics output of the entire United States. Of the myriad potteries located here, the Homer Laughlin China Company-- established in East Liverpool in the early 1870s but eventually relocated across the Ohio River to the new town of Newell--was among the giants. It is with this pottery that the William Wells House is linked.

Rise of the Homer Laughlin Pottery Company

By the 1870s, three decades after the birth of the industry in East Liverpool, the pottery market was shifting as the popularity of the comparatively crude yellow-ware faded in favor of a more desirable white ware which was available as an import from England.⁷ The need for change was evident, and, in an innovative step toward incentivizing local economic development, the East Liverpool City Council offered \$5,000 in seed money to an entrepreneur who would construct and operate a pottery for the production of whiteware. In 1871, two brothers, Homer and Shakespeare Laughlin, established a partnership to manufacture

⁷Jack Welch, "History of the Homer Laughlin China Company," Internet website, http://justdishesdinnerware.com/homer_laughlin_china_company_jack_welch

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pottery and submitted a proposal to the City to erect a two-kiln plant on the banks of the Ohio River. Their proposal was accepted by the City Council and the Laughlins paid fellow potter Benjamin Harker \$300 for a tract adjacent to Harker's own plant.⁸ Their new pottery was completed in 1873.

The Laughlin Brothers soon gained a reputation for excellence and in 1876 their white graniteware was honored with the receipt of an award at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. By the next year, Shakespeare Laughlin, the younger of the two brothers, wished to move on to other interests. The business continued as a sole proprietorship known as the Homer Laughlin China Works, which continued to prosper through into the 1880s and became one of the leading manufacturers of ceramic dinnerware and toiletware in the United States.

William E. Wells Enters the Business

By the late 1880s, the business had grown substantially and, seeking professional help, in 1889 Homer Laughlin placed a classified newspaper advertisement seeking a bookkeeper for his burgeoning operation.⁹ The advertisement was answered by William Edwin Wells, a 26-year-old bookkeeper from Steubenville, Ohio, twenty-five miles downstream from East Liverpool. Young Wells was engaged to manage the books of the growing establishment and soon was managing the entire business, while Homer Laughlin spent his time traveling with his wife.

The Advent of Wells Family Management

Less than a decade later, in 1897, Homer Laughlin decided to retire to California where his son had just graduated from Stanford University and where he himself recognized opportunities for real estate development including the construction of the 1897 Los Angeles landmark which bears his name and was that city's first fireproofed, steel-reinforced building. Laughlin sold his pottery to a group including his former bookkeeper, William E. Wells, along with Pittsburgher Louis Aaron and his sons Marcus and Charles, with Louis Aaron assuming responsibility for the presidency of the company. The sale was consummated on December 7, 1897 and W. E. Wells was named general manager. While the Aarons were major shareholders and Louis Aaron was the company president, it was Wells, as secretary-treasurer and general manager, and later his progeny who ran the company on a day-to-day basis. The Aarons lived in Pittsburgh for all of their more-than-a-century association with the Homer Laughlin Pottery.¹⁰ The growth of the pottery continued unabated and by 1899 a second plant was built in East Liverpool, with a third following in 1903. In *The Collector's Encyclopedia of Homer Laughlin China*, ceramics historian Joanne Jasper notes,

⁸Harker's descendants would eventually build a house on Virginia Terrace, near the nominated property.

⁹Biographical information relating to William Wells and his family is drawn from "W. E. Wells, the Great Chinemaker," appearing on the Internet website www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wellsfam/wfrahome.html and from Jo Cunningham, *Homer Laughlin: A Giant Among Dishes 1873-1939*, Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer Publishing, Ltd., 1998, p. 21-22.

¹⁰Telephone conversation between the preparer of this nomination and Robert M. Wells, III on November 18, 2008.

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“under this management the company prospered greatly and launched on a career of producing truly enormous quantities of china for America's tables.”¹¹

The Birth of Newell, West Virginia

Wells and the Aarons recognized the need for further expansion but East Liverpool offered no suitable land. As the third East Liverpool plant was being built, the company acquired from the Newell family of Hancock County, West Virginia, a 500-acre tract known locally as the “Jimmy Newell farm” on the opposite side of the Ohio River. The North American Manufacturing Company was established as a subsidiary of the Laughlin pottery with the purpose of developing the newly-acquired Newell property. Building lots were laid out, streets, infrastructure, and utilities were installed, and town of Newell was born (Fig. 3). Among the original streets in the area of the Wells house were Wells Street, Aaron Avenue, and Knowles Avenue, the latter also named for a leading figure in the local pottery scene. Portions of these streets were never opened and a 1927 survey platted new building lots where houses were built for family members near to the Wells house of twenty years earlier.

At the time Newell was laid out, the only crossing of the Ohio River was by ferry but in mid-1904 Wells and the North American Manufacturing Company began work on a suspension bridge (Fig. 3). On July 4, 1905, the first traffic used the bridge, led by William E. Wells and Edwin Knowles traveling in Knowles' automobile.¹² The Newell street car line opened ten days later and while the street car line ceased to operate, to this day the company's toll suspension bridge continues to serve the population on both sides of the river.

Continued Growth under Wells Management

Concomitant with the construction of the bridge, Plant No. 4 was built at Newell and became the largest pottery plant ever built in the nation, allowing the Homer Laughlin operation to produce 300,000 pieces of ware daily—ten percent of the total domestic production capacity of the time. Leading consumers of Homer Laughlin's products included the F. W. Woolworth Company, one of the nation's largest 5- & 10-cent variety stores. Woolworth would be a major consumer of Homer Laughlin ware for decades. In January, 1917, to recap their business for the previous year, Wells wrote to the Woolworth Company, “I think that I may safely say that this is the first time in history that the purchases of any one concern from any one pottery firm have reached the million (dollar) mark in one year.” At an average price of 72 cents per dozen, \$1 million in sales accounted for 16.7 million pieces of ware sold to one customer in one year. Among the pottery's other leading customers was the Chicago-based American Cereal Company, who “was packing oatmeal bowls in Mother's Oats boxes as fast as Homer Laughlin could produce them.” A suspension bridge was built to connect Newell to East Liverpool, and a trolley line was laid out as well and early in 1907 the company headquarters were moved across the river to Newell. The firm's peak employment was reached in the late

¹¹Quoted on Internet website www.missing-piece.com/HLC_HISTORY.html

¹²Gates, William C., *The City of Hills and Kilns: Life and Work in East Liverpool, Ohio* (East Liverpool: East Liverpool Historical Society, 1984), p. 175.

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Wells, William E., House
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1920s with 3,500 people working in the five Newell plants. Laughlin became an exclusively West Virginia firm with the abandonment of the three earlier plants, and the economic impact of its payroll in the Northern Panhandle was tremendous.¹³

Over the years, the plant employed a variety of noted artists and ceramists, among them Frederick Hurten Rhead (1880-1939), who joined the pottery in 1927, as General Manager William E. Wells' career was nearing its end. Rhead developed a series of new innovations for Homer Laughlin, and produced a broad array of ware which continues to this day to be valuable within the collectors' market. Among these are Newell, and Virginia Rose, the latter of which was named for Wells' grand-daughter. Rhead's most enduring creation, however, was Fiesta, developed in 1935, four years after the death of William E. Wells and under the general superintendency of William Wells' son Arthur, who by then was occupying his father's house.

William E. Wells, Industry Giant

Returning to the early years of the twentieth century, at the same time that the 1905-1906 plant was being built, William E. Wells was formulating plans for a substantial new residence befitting his stature as a major manufacturing mogul. He chose a site commanding a panoramic view of Newell, the Ohio River, and East Liverpool. Wells engaged the architectural firm of Thayer and Thayer to design his new home, built in the Colonial Revival style.

Wells would go on to become one of the giants in the international pottery industry. Discussing the Homer Laughlin Pottery, a 1925 history of West Virginia noted:

The directing and managing head of this great industry is W. E. Wells, the genius of pottery manufacture and the biggest man in the pottery trade of the world. He is secretary and treasurer of the company, but has in reality been everything from office boy to president. . . . Mr. Wells has served as chairman of the Republican State Convention, and was a member of the commission for the settlement of the West Virginia-Virginia debt, and some of his suggestions effected a saving to the state of many thousand dollars.¹⁴

That same publication, describing Wells' 1907 home, noted, "His residence stands on an eminence overlooking the town of Newell and commands a view of the Ohio Valley for many miles."¹⁵

Beyond his role as a leading industrialist, William E. Wells was also a well-respected leader in the community. He was president of the Potters National Bank in East Liverpool and also served as a director of the Edwin M. Knowles China Company with plants in Newell and in nearby Chester, West Virginia, just upriver from Newell and also opposite East Liverpool, the North American Manufacturing Company, the Newell Water and Power Company, and the Newell Bridge and Street Railway. Recognized as a leader throughout his industry, he was Chairman of the Labor Committee of the United States Potters

¹³Welch., *Op. Cit.*

¹⁴*The History of West Virginia, Old and New* (Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1923), p. 584-585.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

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Association and also appeared as a spokesperson for the pottery manufacturers before U. S. Congressional and Senate Committees concerning tariff bills. Locally, he was affiliated with the East Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, the American Ceramic Society, and the Masonic Lodge. A valued philanthropist in the community, he was known as the "father of the YMCA," served as chairman of the East Liverpool War Chest during World War One, donated substantially toward to construction of the City Hospital and contributed \$30,000 toward the construction of the high school in Newell which would bear his name. His active service to the community ended with his retirement in 1930, at which time his son, Robert, assumed his father's duties as secretary and general manager. At the time of William E. Wells' retirement, the position of Chairman of the Board was created for him; he retained that office at the time of his death at the age of 67, whereupon his son, Joseph Mahan Wells, took over his father's position at the plant.

Death of William E. Wells and Subsequent Ownership of the House

William E. Wells died in 1931, having lived in his Newell residence since it was completed in 1907 and having been intimately associated with the Homer Laughlin company and with the international manufacture of pottery for more than three decades. His son, Joseph M. Wells (1889-1970) assumed his father's duties, followed by his grandson, Joseph, Jr. The Aaron family had retained partial ownership over the decades, until 2002, when in a friendly acquisition, the Wells family acquired the Aarons' interest, marking the end of a 105-year partnership. The company is presently headed by Joseph M. Wells, III, the great grandson of W. E. Wells.¹⁶

After the 1931 death of William E. Wells, his home in Newell passed to his son and daughter-in-law, Arthur Atkinson Wells and his wife, Roberta M. Wells. Arthur Wells (1898-1985) was born one year after his father assumed the position of general manager of the Laughlin pottery. A 1922 graduate of Princeton University, after a short stint on Wall Street he joined with the family business, becoming general superintendent and then vice president for manufacturing, continuing the direct line of management and association with the ceramics industry (of the family and of the house) which his father has established four decades previously. In 1934 Arthur Wells undertook a major remodeling of the property from designs by the Pittsburgh architect, W. S. Struthers, adding a substantial baronial livingroom to the north elevation. The family home later passed to William E. Wells' grandson, Robert M. Wells, the only child of Arthur and Roberta Wells who had lived in a guest house (known to the family as the "little house") on the family property until he took over his grandfather's house.¹⁷ Robert Wells became vice president of the pottery, continuing the unbroken association of the house with the industry, and lived here until his death in 2007, at which time the property was left to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

¹⁶Bob, Page, Dale Frederiksen, and Dean Six. **Homer Laughlin: Decades of Dinnerware.** (Greensboro, NC: Page/Frederickson Publishing Co., 2003).

¹⁷The "little house" is extant nearby on Virginia Terrace but is not on the same parcel as the W. E. Wells house and is not included within the nominated area. From a telephone conversation between the preparer of this nomination and Robert M. Wells, III on November 18, 2008.

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National Register Criteria

The significance of the William E. Wells House under National Register Criterion B is based upon its association with William E. Wells and, peripherally, with his descendants who lived here as well and who, like their father and grandfather, were leaders in the ceramics industry. Recognized both as a giant in the worldwide manufacture of ceramics and as a pivotal community leader in Newell, West Virgilia and East Liverpool, Ohio, as noted above, William E. Wells was hired by Homer Laughlin Brothers in 1889 and assumed the management of the Homer Laughlin China Company in 1897. His obituary implies that he lived in East Liverpool during his early years of association with the pottery but no other properties associated with Wells between 1889 and 1907 have been identified. The subject property, built in the new community of Newell, which he founded, clearly reflects his ascendancy as an industrial leader and it was here that he lived during the majority of his years as general manager of the operation.

The property's Criterion C significance is established by its position as a distinctive locally-significant example of Colonial Revival-style architecture, as that design mode was interpreted in the first decade of the twentieth century. The Colonial Revival style was born of the fervor of patriotism in the wake of the American Centennial of 1876 and architects and untrained contractors alike followed eighteenth-century design precedents in creating domestic architecture for America's working class and industrial leaders alike. Some examples of Colonial Revival-style design were faithful reproductions of earlier antecedents, while others merely borrowed the occasional detail, window form, or plan.

The Wells House represents transitional design in its monumental stair hall, wainscot-paneled interior rooms, and the use of polychrome art glass, which are more suggestive of the nineteenth-century Queen Anne style.¹⁸ Its symmetrical facade, with a centered third-story gable dormer with a Palladian-derived window and the frontispiece entrance are clearly suggestive of the Colonial Revival, even given the loss of the full portico which originally shielded the principal entrance. As noted above, the portico was removed in the 1980s because of deterioration. The property would be a more faithful representative of period architecture were the portico intact. However, the essentially unaltered character of the balance of the exterior, coupled with the integrity of the entirety of the interior, including the plan, form, and finishes of virtually every major space which reflect both 1907 and 1935, adequately compensate for the loss of the portico.

The 1934-1935 addition is itself architecturally significant, representing a twentieth-century adaptation of Medieval Revival-style design. The addition replaced the original living room and a porte-cochere, the latter of which more closely reflected the early twentieth-century era of horse-drawn carriages than the 1930s and mechanized travel. Consisting primarily of a spacious livingroom, the addition with its paneled wood walls and mantle, the ornamental plaster ceiling, the stone end wall, and the carvings all reflect sophisticated levels both of design and craftsmanship. In addition, the whimsical carved shields which

¹⁸Receipts confirm that the lavish interior woodwork and the art glass windows from the original 1907 construction are the product of the Hyde-Murphy Company, a major producer of architectural millwork and art glass from Ridgway, Pennsylvania. Their long history as well as many examples of their work are documented in the National Register nomination for the Ridgway Historic District (NR 2003).

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ornament the walls themselves tell the story of the Wells family and their heritage. The second-floor bathrooms with their decorative tile finishes may have been remodeled at this time, but that is not confirmed.

The 1934-1935 remodeling under the ownership of Arthur E. Wells also resulted in the conversion of the 1907 billiard room into a high-style Art Deco-style cocktail lounge, designed one year after the repeal of Prohibition. The lounge, finished in black with stainless steel trim, clearly reflect the Art Deco style which represented the pinnacle of modern design in the 1920s and 1930s. Further, the use of Micarta for the wall and ceiling finishes marked the introduction of a new and innovative decorative material into the design of an entirely new space for the 1907 house.

Architecture

The William E. Wells House is the work of architects C. C. and A. L. Thayer, who were responsible for the original 1907 design, and W. S. Struthers, who designed the 1934-1935 modifications. Carroll C. and Albert L. Thayer practiced in New Castle, Pennsylvania, from the 1890s through the early decades of the twentieth century. C. C. Thayer (1862-1938) was in practice in New Castle as early as 1892, when he prepared plans for the Shenango Valley Hospital. By 1902 the practice was established as C. C. and A. L. Thayer, including A. L. Thayer (b. 1876), who graduated from the University of Illinois in 1898. The firm expanded their commissions into Ohio and West Virginia until Albert Thayer moved to Cleveland about 1920, after which time the firm continued Thayer and Thayer and later as the Thayer Company. In addition to residential architecture such as the Wells House, the Thayers also were responsible for the design of a variety of institutional and commercial buildings in the region. Among these were the 1908 Masonic Temple in Butler, Pennsylvania (southeast of New Castle), a 1910 addition and other alterations to the Masonic Temple in East Liverpool, Ohio (with which W. E. Wells was closely associated),¹⁹ and the Terrace Avenue School, Greer Building, and National Guard Armory (NR 1990), the latter three of which are located in their home town of New Castle. The Thayers also designed Old Main at Westminster College, north of New Castle in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania and apparently developed a speciality in the field of educational design, since they were listed in Bruce's *Architects Directory of Schoolhouse Architects*.²⁰

Considerably less is known of architect William S. Struthers, whom Arthur A. Wells engaged in the 1930s to undertake a major addition to his father's home, consisting of the removal of the original livingroom and porte-cochere on the north elevation and their replacement with an elongated, coffered wood-paneled livingroom. Struthers practiced in Pittsburgh and is known to have designed the First Congregational Church (1900; now the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of St. Nicholas) and the New Bethlehem Savings Bank (1930), in rural New Bethlehem, Clarion County, northeast of Pittsburgh. The cost of the remodeling

¹⁹*Ohio Architect*, April, 1910, p. 45.

²⁰Correspondence to preparer from Lu Donnelly, author of *The Buildings of the United States: Western Pennsylvania* [MS, not yet published], 2008 and from Philadelphia Architects and Buildings website, www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/

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as \$25,000 and Struthers was to be paid a fee of 6% of the construction cost, or \$1,500.00. A handwritten letter from Struthers to Arthur Wells, dated February 1, 1936, is testimony to Wells' apparent satisfaction with Struthers' work:

Opening a letter containing a check for \$2,000 is indeed a pleasant sensation, but let me assure you that the knowledge that you and Mrs. Wells are so well satisfied is every bit as pleasant. To hear that I had been able to help you both work out what were often your own ideas is a great satisfaction to me. I hope that you may long enjoy the home that you have given so much thought to secure.²¹

Summarizing, the William E. Wells House meets National Register Criterion B for its association with pottery giant W. E. Wells, who built and lived in the house throughout his years as a leader in the international pottery business, and Criterion C as a locally distinctive example of the Colonial Revival style.

²¹Struthers to Wells letter, part of the materials secured by the National Trust from the Robert Wells Estate.

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10. Geographical Data

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Being that parcel depicted on Hancock County, West Virginia Tax Map G6C, Parcel No. 36.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated parcel consists only of the 5-acre lot containing the William E. Wells House, its two contributing dependencies, and its immediately associated lawns. Prior to the subdivision of building lots from original Wells holdings, additional adjacent acreage existed in Newell Heights, but building lots were partitioned off and other houses were erected nearby. The nominated parcel has been associated with the William E. Wells House since its original date of construction.

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PHOTOGRAPHY LOG

All Photographs:
Wells, William E., House
Hancock County, WV
David L. Taylor, 2008
Taylor & Taylor Associates, Inc., Brookville, PA

1. Facade, looking south along entrance sidewalk (Resource No. 5) and showing frontispiece entrance, gable dormer with Palladian motif, etc.
2. Southeast perspective, looking northwest and showing overall form and finishes, roof system, art glass windows on interior stair, c. 1934 addition on east elevation, etc.
3. East elevation, looking west and showing bow-front bay of 1934-1935 livingroom addition, roof form and finish, gable dormer opening into third floor, etc.
4. Facade, detail, showing ashlar stone finish window opening into "Reception Room," including art glass transoms.
5. West elevation, looking east, and showing 2-story bow-front bay serving diningroom on first floor and bedroom above
6. Terrace which surrounds house on north and west sides, detail, looking east showing typical form and finish
7. Interior, stair hall, first story, looking south and showing overall scale and finishes, wainscot, beamed ceilings, and stair accessing second story.
8. Interior, stair hall at foot of stairs, looking north and showing stone archway, side door and surround, stone floor, part of the 1934-1935 remodeling
9. Interior, diningroom, detail, looking south and showing bow-front bay, china cupboard on left and fireplace on right
10. Interior, diningroom, detail, showing built-in china cabinet, form, finish, detail, looking east
11. Interior, livingroom, view west to east and showing overall finish, stone end wall and arch, etc.
12. Interior, livingroom, view east to west and showing fireplace on left, paneled wall surfaces, door opening into stair hall with livingroom beyond.

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13. Interior, detail showing "Gentlemen's Room," looking from east to west and showing flooring, built-in book case, window with art glass transom, etc.
14. Interior, office, detail of ornamental painting on ceiling
15. Interior, detail, showing cocktail lounge in basement, Art Deco-style bar, finishes, etc.
16. Interior, detail of second story in hallway, showing upstairs balustrade, built-in closet, door trim, etc., looking south
17. Interior second floor, bedroom, showing bow-front bay, fenestration, trim, etc.
18. Interior, bedroom, showing Arts-and-Crafts-style mantel
19. Interior, second floor, bedroom, showing French Provincial-style mantel
20. Third floor, view south to north and showing double door entrance from second floor, flooring, finishes, etc.
21. Garages (Resources 2 and 3), looking south
22. Entry portals, looking north

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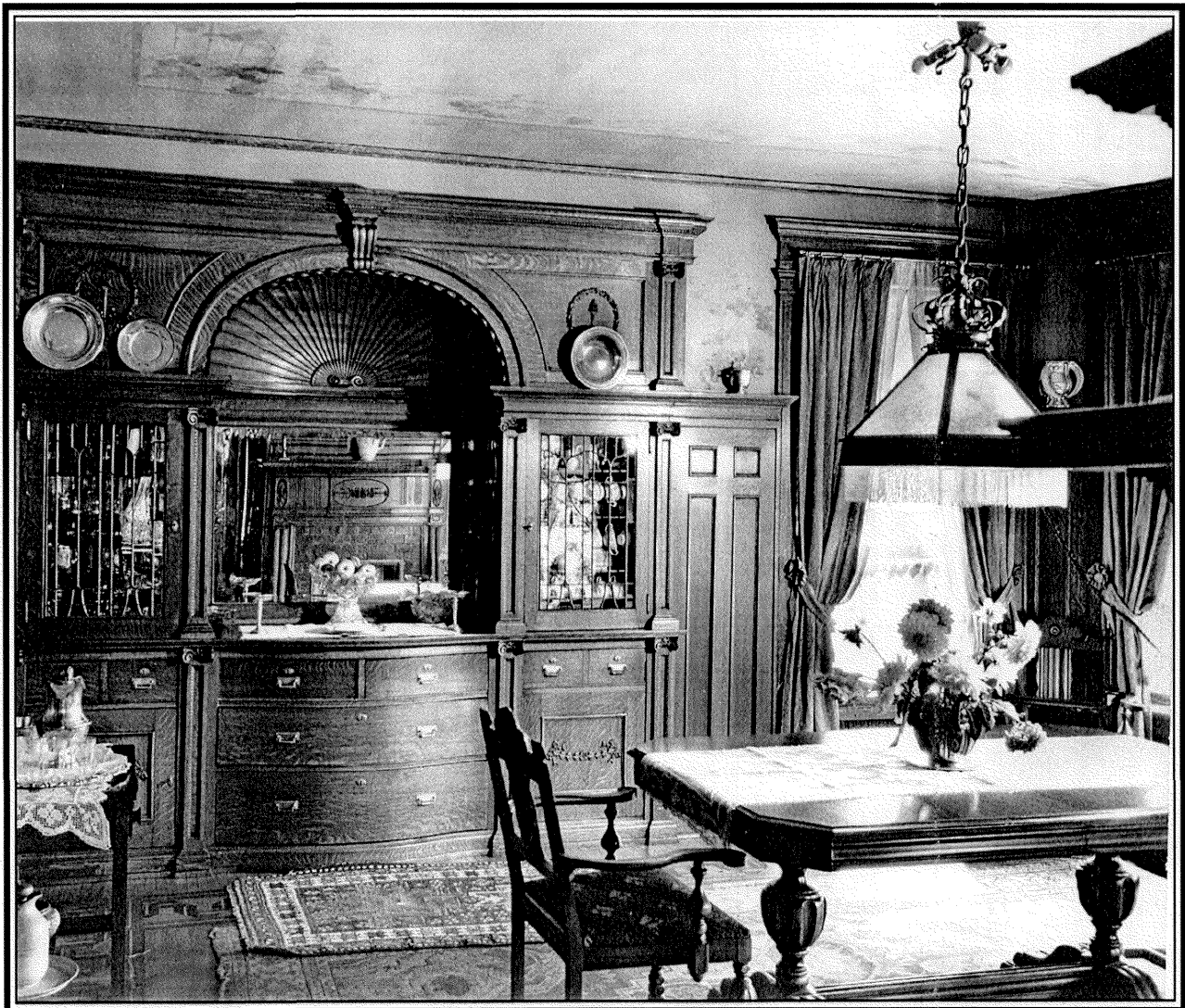


Fig. 1 The diningroom of the Wells House, c. 1907, showing the original mahogany built-in sideboard, the wall finishes, etc.

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Fig. 2 The diningroom c. 1907 showing the original fireplace and the bow-front bay window.

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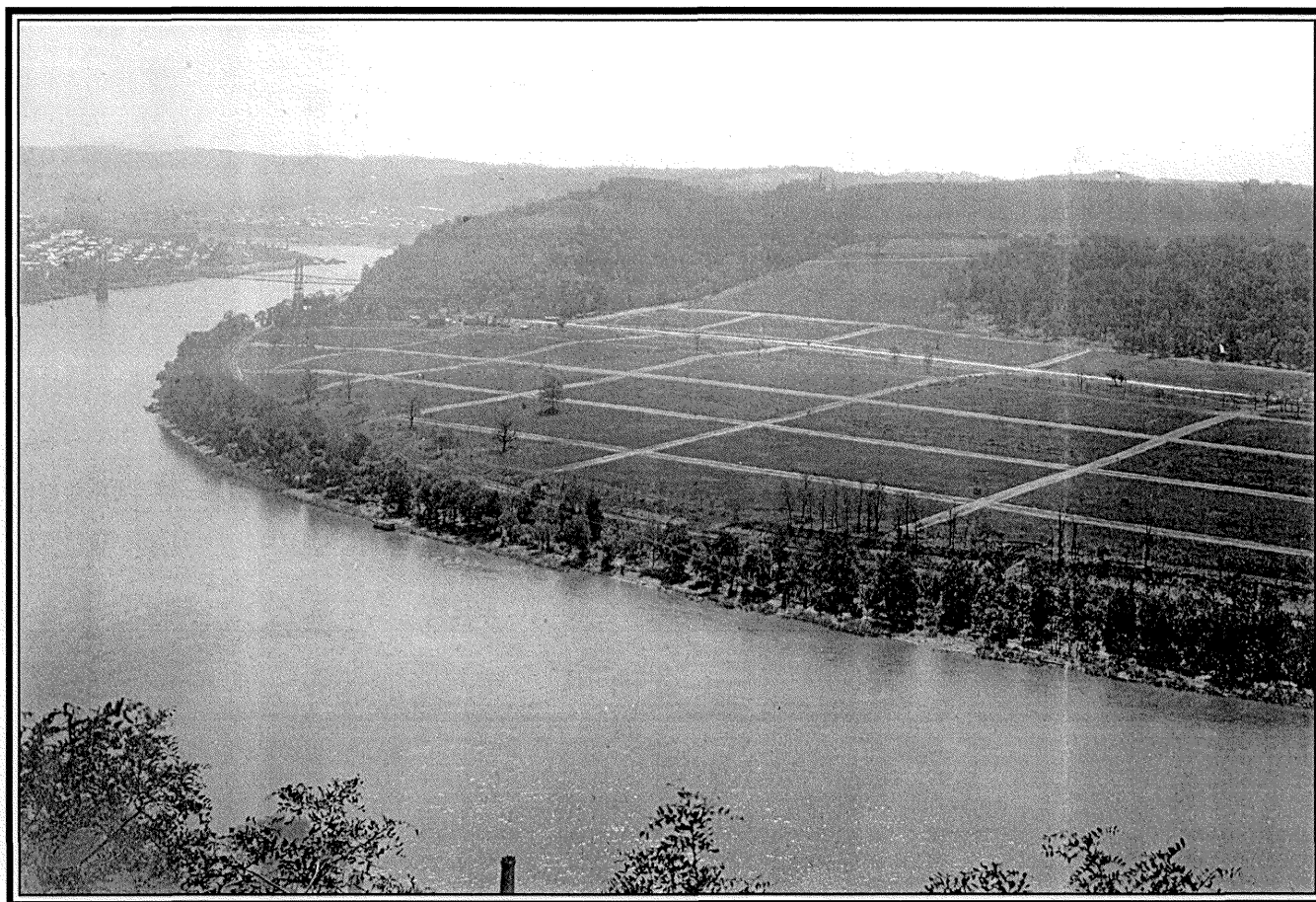
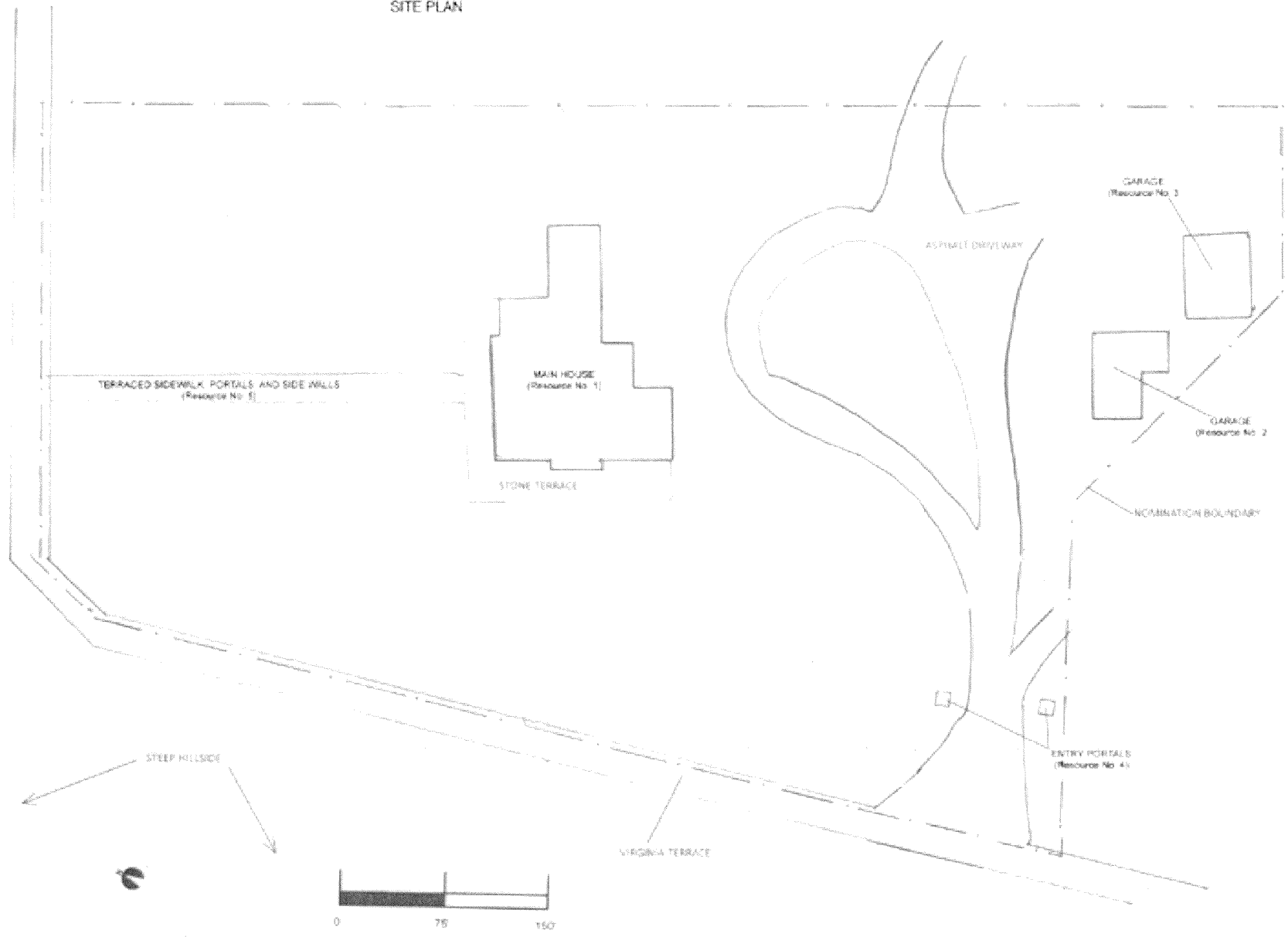


Fig. 3 The Ohio River and Newell, West Virginia c. 1906, after the completion of the suspension bridge (in background) by the North American Manufacturing Company, the development arm of the Wells-Aaron partnership. Virginia Terrace and the Wells House are accessed from Sixth Street, out of this view to the right.

WILLIAM E. WELLS HOUSE
Newell, Hancock County, WV

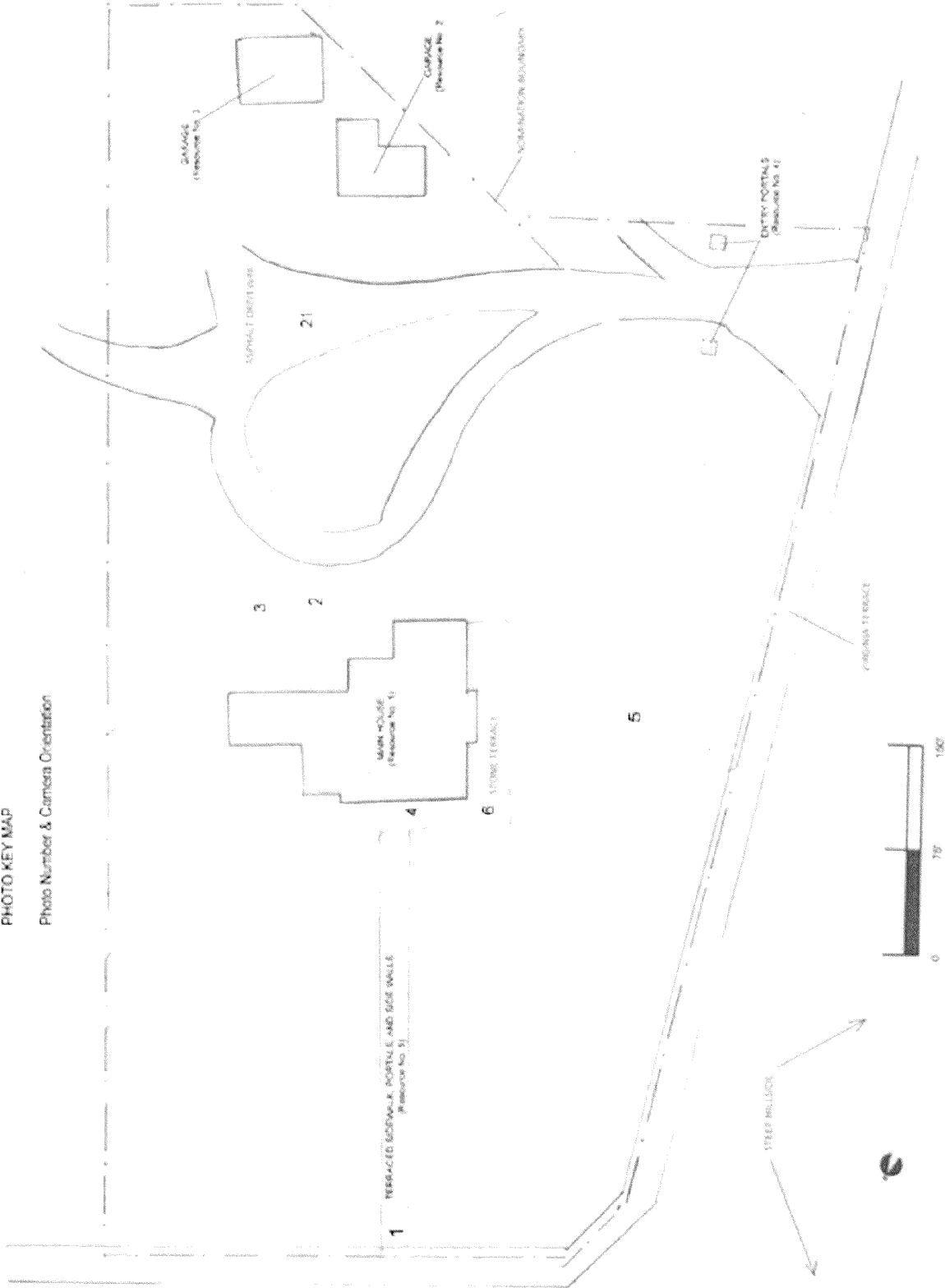
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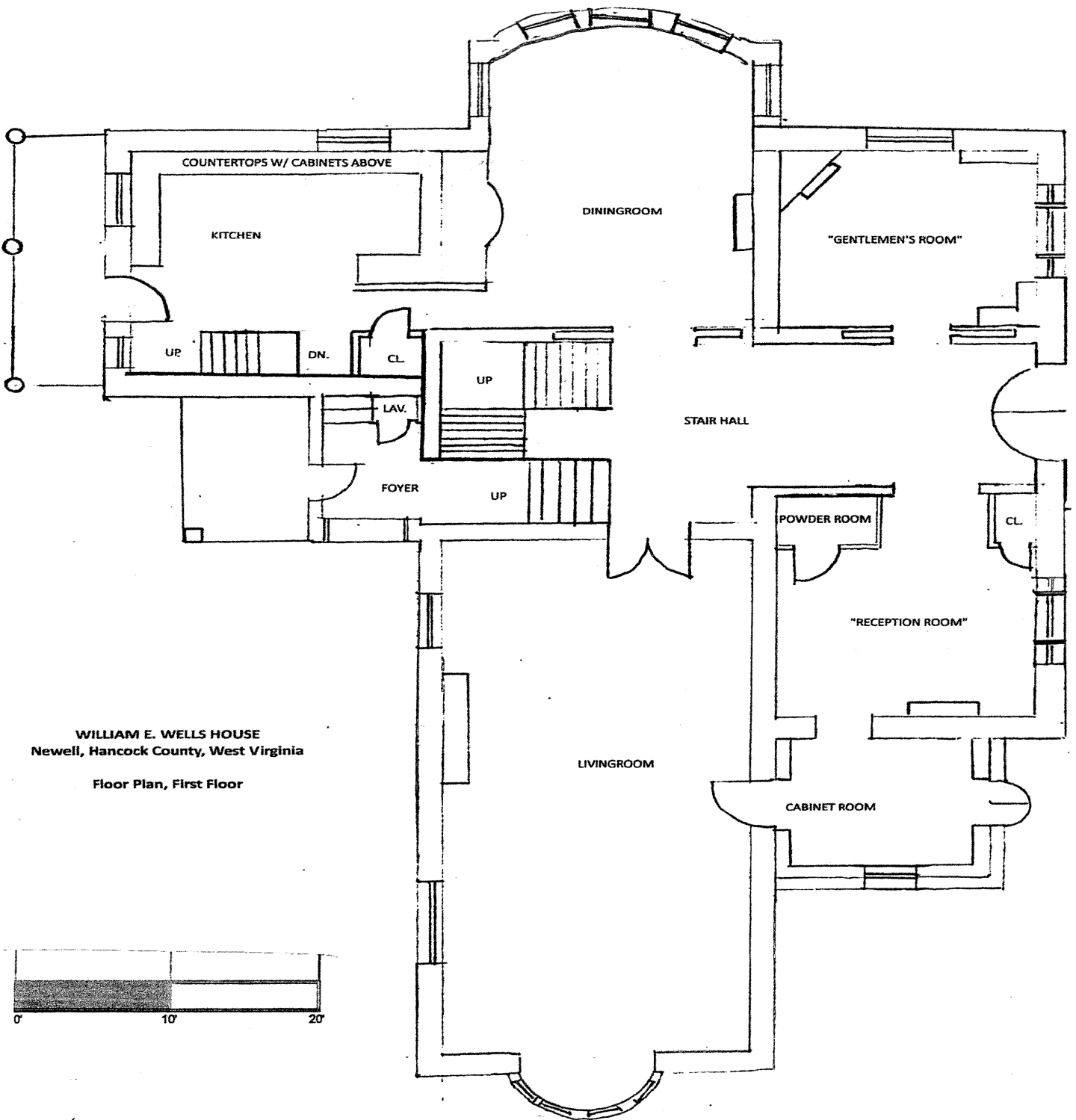


WILLIAM E. WELLS HOUSE
Newell, Hancock County, WV

PHOTO KEY MAP

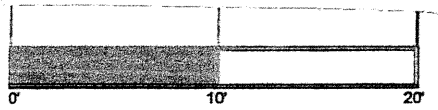
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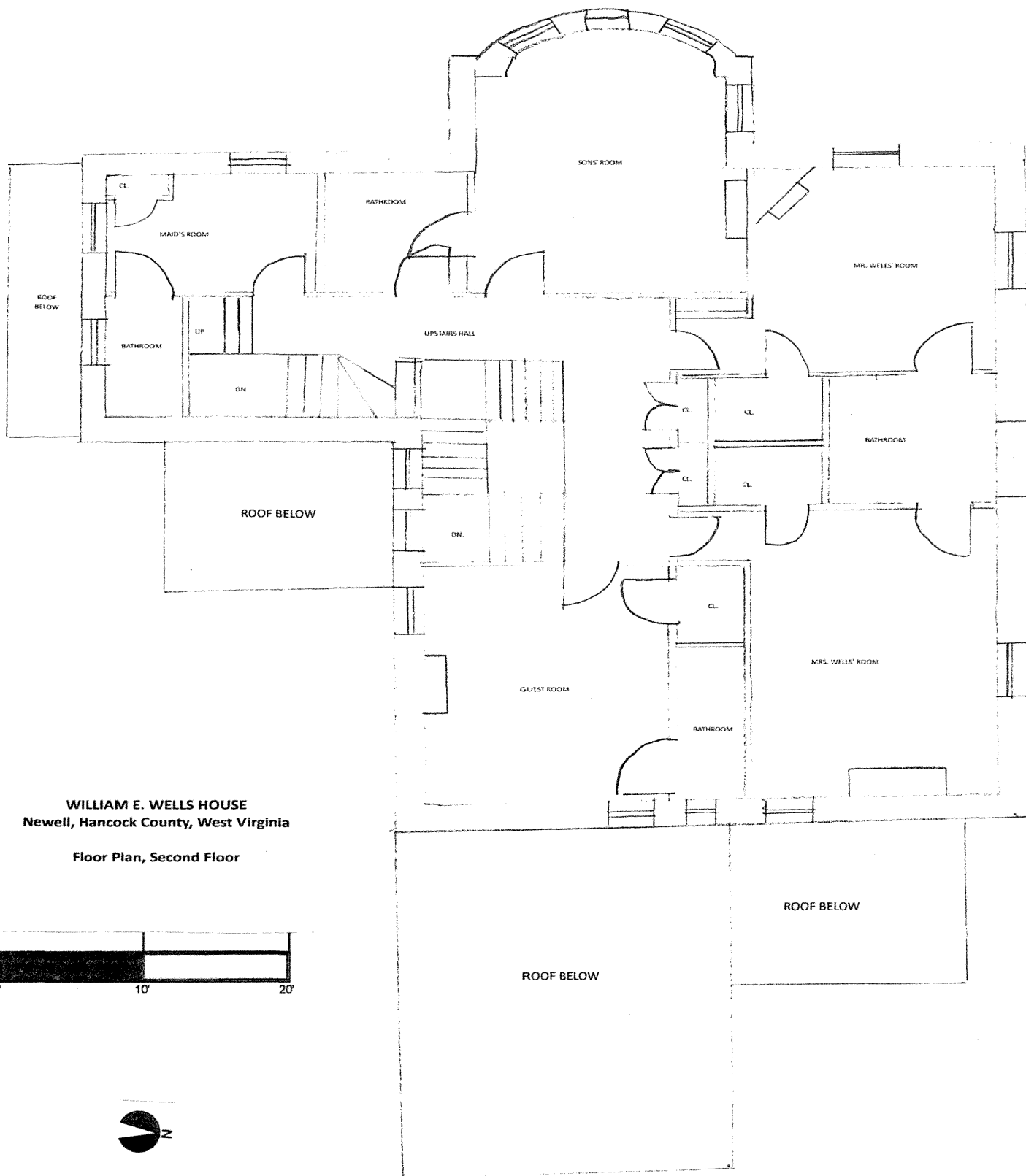




WILLIAM E. WELLS HOUSE
 Newell, Hancock County, West Virginia

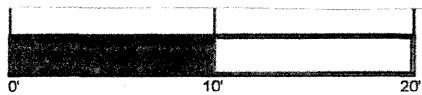
Floor Plan, First Floor

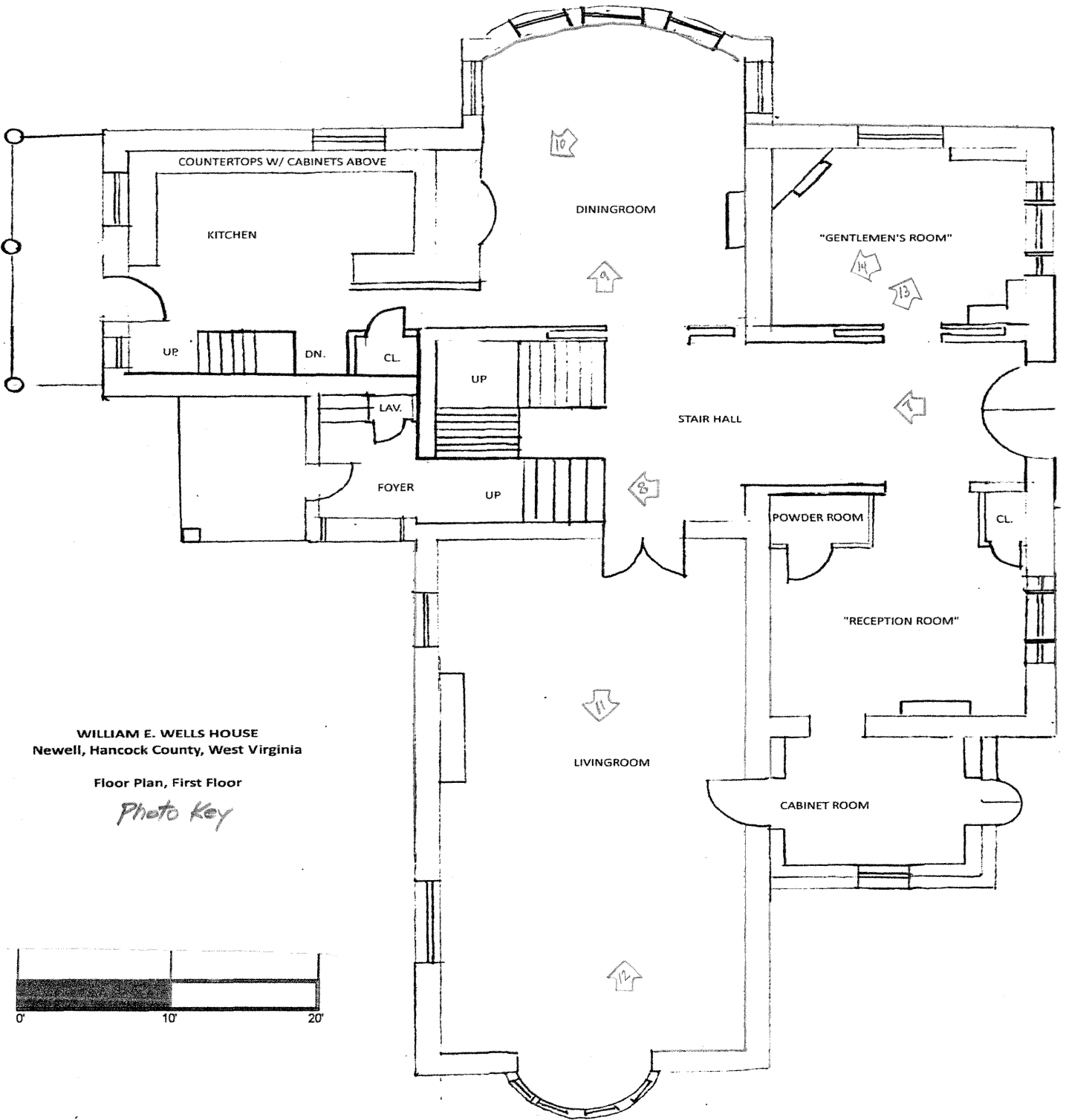




WILLIAM E. WELLS HOUSE
 Newell, Hancock County, West Virginia

Floor Plan, Second Floor

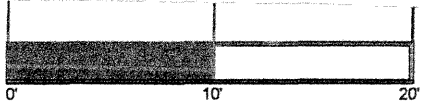


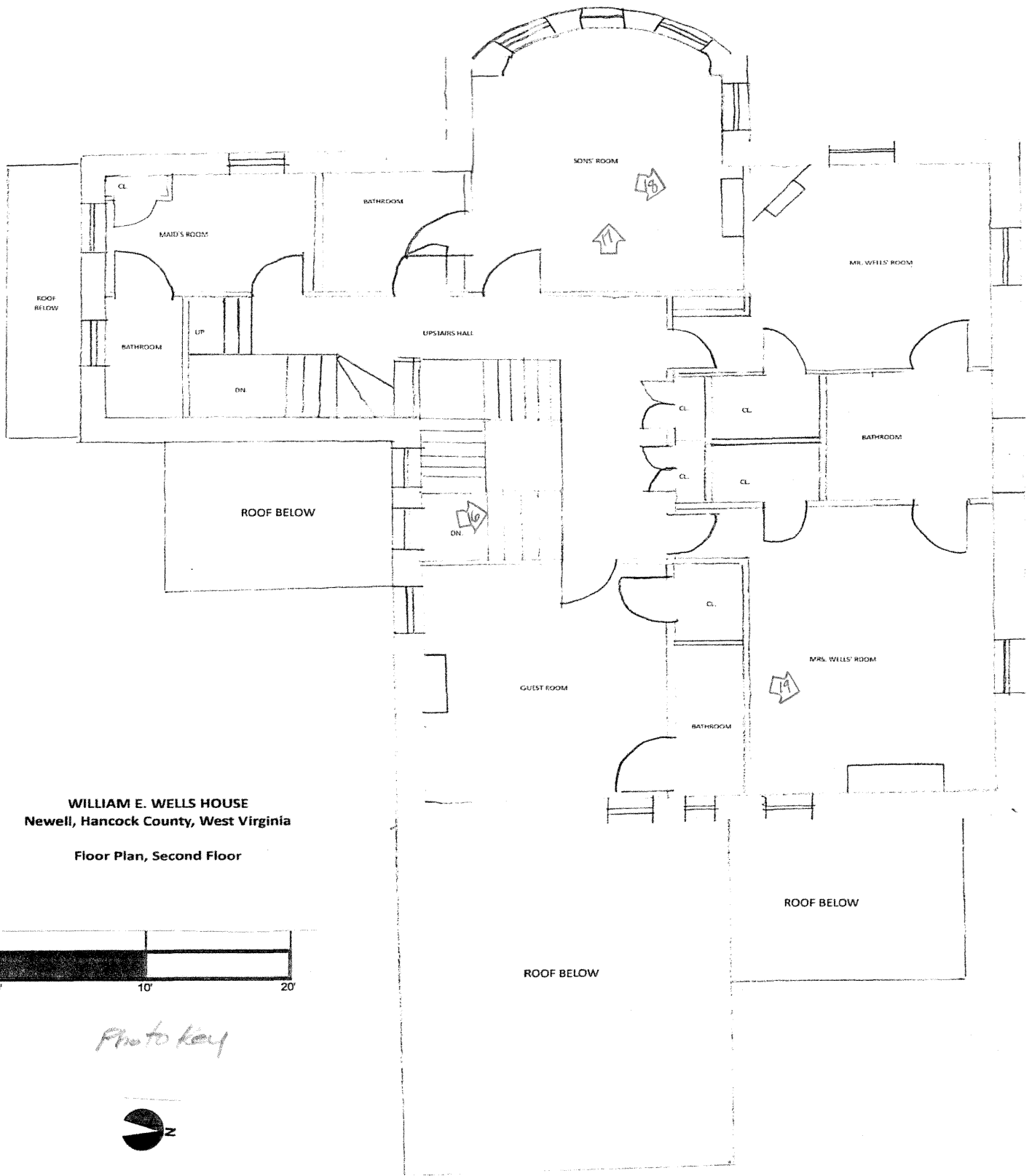


WILLIAM E. WELLS HOUSE
 Newell, Hancock County, West Virginia

Floor Plan, First Floor

Photo Key





WILLIAM E. WELLS HOUSE
 Newell, Hancock County, West Virginia

Floor Plan, Second Floor

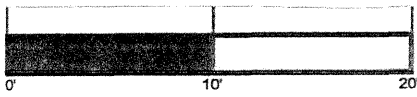


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