

WILSON ESTATE
9100 Rockville Pike
Bethesda
Montgomery County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-1105

HABS
MD
16-BETH,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WILSON ESTATE

HABS
MD
16-BETH
2-

HABS No. MD-1105

Location: 9100 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, Montgomery County, Maryland.

USGS Kensington, Maryland Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
NW 18.317750.4319120
NE 18.317920.4319120
SE 18.317980.4319000
SW 18.317750.4318280

Present Owner: United States Government. Health and Human Services.

Present Occupant: Section on Developmental Psychology and Developmental Traumatology.

Present Use: Offices.

Significance: The Wilson Estate derives historical significance from the role played by the Wilson family in attracting the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to Bethesda through their initial donation of land, and from the continuing growth of NIH into its suburban campus setting. Luke and Helen Wilson's donations of land to the federal government enabled the National Institute of Health, which had been crowded into buildings at 25th and E Streets, N.W., the opportunity to expand. As the scope of the institution's mission grew, so too did the physical plant; work at NIH soon covered the entire spectrum of research on human disease and encompassed several distinct institutes. This rapid and orchestrated growth dramatically changed the face of Bethesda. Today NIH is the most dominant institutional presence in Montgomery County. The Wilson's gift of land to the federal government augured this physical transformation of the local community. On a national level, the bequest enabled the growth of the institution into one of the world's preeminent medical research facilities.

This collection of buildings within its landscape is also significant as one of the architecturally distinguished Rockville Pike estates of the early twentieth century, representing an important phase in the development of Montgomery County. The Wilson Estate, or Tree Tops, as it was known, was part of a corridor of large, early twentieth-century country estates built by wealthy Washingtonians along Rockville Pike. The Wilson Estate evolved at the height of an era of great country houses in Montgomery County. The Wilson Estate was distinct from many of these other country houses, however, in its rustic English style; most of the grand houses along the Pike reflected the colonial history of the country and were designed in a corresponding Georgian Revival style, such as the neighboring George Freeland Peter Estate (Building 16 on the NIH campus).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. HISTORICAL CONTEXT¹

The Rockville Pike Estates: By the early 1920s, when Luke and Helen Wilson purchased the property that was to become Tree Tops, Bethesda was fast developing as a wealthy suburb of Washington, D.C. The Rockville Pike had long been the major transportation route between Georgetown and Frederick, but the road remained rugged and the area largely agricultural until after World War I. In 1895, new electric railways began operating along the Pike, the beginning of an extensive transportation system that, within two decades, with the increasing use of automobiles and improvements to the roadways, brought the Bethesda district into relatively easy reach of Washington. Large country estates built by wealthy Washingtonians increasingly replaced farmsteads on the rolling hills between Chevy Chase and Rockville.² Between circa 1914 and 1930, ten large estate houses were built. The farthest south was the George Freeland Peter Estate (the last of the ten to be constructed); the farthest north was near Randolph Road. Of the ten houses, nine remain standing today.³ By the early 1930s, a ride along the Pike constituted a veritable parade past the elegant houses of prominent Washington figures, from George F. Peter, the Canon of Washington National Cathedral, who had grown up in Tudor Place in Georgetown and was a descendant of the first mayor of Georgetown, to Gilbert Grosvenor, one of the first editors of the National Geographic Society magazine:

Starting with the Woodmont Country Club just north of Bethesda on the west side of the Pike one passed Dr. Freeland Peter's huge mansion with its beautifully trimmed grounds. Next came the Luke I. Wilson estate where oil lamps glowed hospitably at night from the entrance gates; then Brainerd [sic] Parker's magnificent home on the hill overlooking Cedar Lane with close cropped meadows on each side of the long driveway. Beyond the Parkers was the old Bethesda Presbyterian Church and the Victorian manse next door. Their owner, Mrs. William Ritch Kelley, took pride in maintaining the old church grounds and cemetery in attractive condition.

Moving northward one passed next the Charles Hawley place with its beautiful stone wall facing the driveway. Just beyond was the 150-acre Pooks Hill estate of Merle Thorpe. The castle at the top of the hill had such a fascination for Princess Martha of Norway that she wasn't content until President Franklin D. Roosevelt made a personal appeal to the Thorpes to sell the place to the Norwegian government. The Princess and her three children spent several happy years there while her country was overrun by the Germans.

¹This report draws upon extensive documentation contained in the "Preliminary Historical Assessment of the Wilson Estate," completed by Tory L. Taylor, Robinson & Associates, Inc., September 1991.

²Richard K. MacMaster and Ray Eldon Heibert, *A Grateful Remembrance: The Story of Montgomery County, Maryland*.

³Telephone interview with Ray Gauzza, author of a manuscript on the history of the twentieth-century estates along Rockville Pike, conducted by Judith Robinson, Robinson & Associates, Inc., December 1984.

On the other side of the Pike, near Bethesda, was the George Hamilton estate with acres and acres of beautiful lawns and greenhouses. Farther out was the Charles Corby home overlooking the grounds of the Georgetown Preparatory School. The Corby estate had its own private swimming pool and a lovely boxwood garden.

Most of them passed into oblivion during World War II. With Federal, State, and county taxes mounting higher and higher it was no longer possible for their owners to live in such luxury. The Woodmont County Club sold its land to the Federal Government and developed a new location farther out in the country. Dr. Peter's place was taken over by the Public Health Service, as were the gift acres of the Luke I. Wilson estate. The Parker home had been boarded up for eight years while repeated attempts have been made to turn the land to apartment use. The Hawley estate had also applied for apartment zoning. Pooks Hill was bought by a real estate developer with the intention of turning the whole estate into apartments, but the development was stopped short with one apartment building when zoning action on the tract was reversed. The Hamilton and Corby estates have been taken over by tax-free Catholic schools.⁴

Today, some remnants of these estates can be still be identified, mostly incorporated into various office parks or large residential developments. In addition, the names of many of the drives and lanes located in Bethesda originate from the families and estates once located along the Rockville Pike.

B. SPECIFIC HISTORY OF THE SITE

1. **Purchase of the Britton Farm:** In 1923, Helen Wilson purchased 95 acres of land,⁵ known as the old Britton Farm,⁶ on the southwest corner of the Rockville Pike and Cedar Lane in Montgomery County. The Britton family farm apparently dates from the mid to late nineteenth century.⁷ It had changed hands at least twice before the Wilsons bought it in 1923 for \$37,500.⁸ An 1879 property atlas shows a main farmhouse near the site of the current Lodge, accessed by a drive from Rockville Pike.⁹ The Britton tract purchased by the Wilsons was just south of a 40-acre farm that had been recently purchased by Helen's sister, Irene Woodward Parker, upon which Irene and her husband, Brainard W. Parker, built their Georgian Revival-style country house, Cedarcroft, around 1923.¹⁰ Helen and Irene's brother, Donald Woodward, then president of Woodward & Lothrop, Washington, D.C.'s notable department store, also maintained a

⁴Gertrude Bradley, *Bethesda Not So Old*, pp. 121-22.

⁵Land Records of Montgomery County.

⁶Dorothy Pugh, *The National Institutes of Health: A Bethesda Landmark Celebrates its Centennial*, p. 12.

⁷G.M. Hopkins, *Atlas of Montgomery County*, 1879.

⁸Baist, *Atlas of Montgomery County*, 1917, and Land Records of Montgomery County.

⁹Hopkins, *Atlas of Montgomery County*, 1879.

¹⁰Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Historic Sites File on Cedarcroft.

summer house not far away.¹¹ In 1924, Luke retired, and the Wilsons, with their son, Luke W., returned to Washington.

2. Development of the Estate: Following their purchase of the land in 1923, the Wilsons had the Britton farmhouse partially demolished and incorporated into the Lodge [see HABS No. MD-1105-B]. A design was prepared for the reconstruction of the existing house into a new building, which the Wilsons called the Lodge. It served as the Wilson's temporary residence while the main house was built.¹² Catherine Woodward Tyssowski (sister of Helen W. Wilson), said that her sister was quite intrigued with the process of rebuilding a dilapidated old house, and she suspected that Helen preferred the challenge of it to building anew.¹³ Since no correspondence between the presumed architect (Edward Clarence Dean) and the Wilsons has been uncovered, it is difficult to determine the exact chronology of the estate's evolution. A small cottage that was known as Top Cottage, presumably for its location high at the southern end of the estate, was one of the first buildings of the estate. Used as a guest house by the Wilsons, Top Cottage was included in the initial gift of land to the government in 1935. As part of NIH property, the Cottage gained a new life as a meeting and entertainment center; the PHS Commissioned Officers met there each week, as did their wives, laboratory heads used it for luncheon meetings, and it was also "a popular spot for parties and receptions."¹⁴ Top Cottage was first moved in 1948 to make way for the construction of the Clinical Center; "the contractor of that day solved the problem, according to Mr. [Clarence] May [Superintendent of Buildings and Grounds before his retirement in 1957], by jacking up the cottage, putting it on skids, and sliding it down the hill."¹⁵ In 1960, it was "crowded out," as the *NIH Record* headline announced, because of additional new construction. Henry Norair, head of Norair Engineering Corporation, the company charged with constructing the office building, planned at that time to remove the frame cottage to his 500-acre farm in Prince George's County.

In 1926, the Wilsons had architect Edward Clarence Dean design the main house, Tree Tops. A garage and small staff quarters near the Lodge (later called the Flat, when it was converted into solely living quarters) was, along with the Lodge, probably part of the original collection of designed estate buildings [see HABS No. MD-1105-C]. The Wilsons also had a small, nineteenth-century, wood-frame house, which they dubbed the Cabin, moved from elsewhere on the estate to a location west of the Lodge [see HABS No. MD-1105-E]. The Cabin was used as a guest house, and, according to William Offutt's book entitled *Bethesda; A Social History* (information gleaned from the *Bethesda Journal* of May 26, 1945, and the *Bethesda Tribune* of

¹¹Guildford, *From Founders to Grandsons, The Story of Woodward & Lothrop*, p. 147.

¹²Interview with Michael Wilson, conducted by Tory L. Taylor of Robinson & Associates, Inc., August 7, 1991.

¹³Interview with Catherine Woodward Tyssowski, conducted by Tory L. Taylor of Robinson & Associates, Inc., July 26, 1991.

¹⁴"Top Cottage Crowded Out, Will 'Retire to the Farm,' *The NIH Record*, Vol. XII, No. 24, November 22, 1960.

¹⁵"Top Cottage Crowded Out, Will 'Retire to the Farm,' *The NIH Record*, Vol. XII, No. 24, November 22, 1960.

June 15, 1945), during World War II the Wilson Cabin was offered by Helen Wilson to the USO for a variety of parties and outdoor activities:

On Sunday afternoon, June 3, [1945] the USO celebrated the opening of the Wilson Cabin on Rockville Pike, a gift from Mrs. Luke I. Wilson. She kept two acres for her Tree Tops home and a small guest house when she donated her land to the National Cancer Research Institute. Helen Woodward Wilson had held a number of receptions and parties for servicemen and women in the home during the war, and now decided that the guest house would provide more opportunities for USO activities.

The “cabin,” all on one floor, had a large main room furnished with a piano, a radio-phonograph and plenty of dancing room. Mrs. Wilson stocked the shelves with books from her own library saying, “Books are no good except to read.” Behind the living room were a screened in porch and a kitchen with a refrigerator that was always full of soft drinks. At one side was a room with windows on all three sides and indirect lighting, which the USO furnished with art supplies, and behind the cottage were an outdoor grill and several tables and benches.

Mrs. Wilson came down to speak briefly at the dedication but did not stay for the baked bean supper, horseshoe pitching, softball game and dancing that followed. With the help of Elizabeth Herriot, music programs filled the cabin on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and there was an open house every Sunday. Parties and picnics for special groups were scheduled on the other days, and the Wilson Cabin was soon almost as popular as the old Safeway on Georgetown Road.¹⁶

Although this anecdote suggests that Helen Wilson donated or “dedicated” the Cabin to NIH for use as a social center, no documentary evidence has been found to indicate that the building was turned over to NIH prior to the transferral of the last Wilson parcel in 1993. It may be that under the special circumstances of World War II, Helen Wilson provided needed entertainment for the USO at the Cabin during wartime. Helen Wilson had already delivered, with the first transfer of land, the Top Cottage for such a purpose.

In 1930, the Wilsons purchased an adjoining tract of land from the McCormack-Goodhurt family, which included a small dwelling (now known as Building 15A) [see HABS No. MD-1105-D]. Helen donated this house along with 14 acres to NIH just eight years later, in 1938, the first of a number of continuing donations. Tree Tops and its surrounding land were donated in 1942, and Helen Wilson retreated to The Lodge until her death in 1960. In the early 1940s, a garage and shed were added to the estate, located close to the Flat. The Lodge was expanded significantly in 1960, to accommodate the Luke W. Wilson family. They remained there until the death of Ruth Ferguson Wilson in 1989. The last remaining portion of land, which included the Lodge, the Flat, the Cabin, and the garage and shed was acquired by NIH in 1993.

3. Life at Tree Tops: The design of the Wilson Estate speaks for the social life that the family maintained, with ample room and guest cottages for extended visits in the English and American country house tradition. The main house had a formality in its large rooms and sophisticated finishes appropriate for entertaining, while the smaller houses had a more rustic flavor. In

¹⁶William Offutt, *Bethesda; A Social History*, p. 684.

Bethesda, the Wilsons were close to family and friends who maintained part-time homes nearby, and they were prominent members of Washington society. While the scale of the estate certainly befitted their social standing, its design was consciously rustic, and at home the Wilsons appear to have enjoyed a fairly informal lifestyle.

4. **Donations of land to NIH:** In politics, Luke Wilson was described as a progressive Democrat and he showed himself to be sympathetic to Roosevelt's aims.¹⁷ The New Deal of the 1930s brought a wave of government expansion and corresponding construction to the Washington area. During the Depression, in the mid-1930s, the Wilsons expressed an interest in donating a portion of their estate to the federal government, if a worthy use could be found. According to the traditional rendition of the story, Luke Wilson first offered the property in a letter addressed to the Secretary of the Interior. Having received no response to the bequest, Wilson sent off a subsequent letter directly to Franklin D. Roosevelt, which achieved the intended result; the letter was directed to the Public Health Service, which was then searching for a farm site on which to raise animals for the National Institute of Health.¹⁸ Family sources confirm that Luke and Helen Wilson had strong philanthropic convictions, and that Helen, in particular, was strongly drawn to the mission of NIH. She had an academic interest in science and, as a result of her mother's battle with cancer, a personal interest in medical research.¹⁹

The Wilsons considered the proposed use in light of the impact it would have both on their remaining property and on the region. The Bethesda community was almost unanimous in its opposition, long having fought encroachments that would compromise the prestige of the area. Objections were lodged by the Bethesda Chamber of Commerce (on which Luke Wilson had served), the Montgomery County Commissioners, and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission.²⁰ Nonetheless, the Wilsons stood by their conviction and in August 1935 donated 45 acres of land, consisting of the southern portion of their estate, with the Top Cottage dwelling, to the United States of America.²¹ By coincidence, a few days later the Social Security Act was signed into effect, providing, among other things, \$2 million per year for the "investigation of disease and problems of sanitation." Since the Wilsons' original offer, senior officials at the Public Health Service had weighed the idea of moving the entire operation of the National Institute of Health out to Bethesda from its limited facilities in Washington. With the newly expanded emphasis on research supported by the Social Security Act and the enthusiasm of the new Surgeon General, Dr. Thomas Parran, approval was gained for a major building

¹⁷"Wilson," *The National Cyclopaedia*.

¹⁸Pugh, *The National Institutes of Health*, p. 3.

¹⁹Interview with Catherine Woodward Tyssowski, conducted by Tory L. Taylor of Robinson & Associates, Inc., July 26, 1991.

²⁰Thompson, "Development of the National Institute of Health from 1930 to 1938," narrative written for cornerstone ceremony, 1938.

²¹Land Records of Montgomery County.

program on the new Bethesda campus. Construction began in 1938 on the three original NIH buildings.²²

Early in 1937, Luke I. Wilson was diagnosed with cancer, and he died in July of that year. That same summer a bill was passed creating the National Cancer Institute.²³ Helen Wilson had lost both her mother and husband to cancer, and in two bequests during 1938, she gave NIH an additional 25 acres of land, intended as a site for the Cancer Institute. One of these two bequests included Building 15A, a house that Mrs. Wilson had purchased in 1930 [see HABS No. MD-1105-D]. This left Mrs. Wilson and her son, Luke Woodward Wilson, with just a 20-acre tract containing most of the buildings of the estate, but landlocked by NIH property. In 1940, she split off nine acres of open land for NIH and, in 1942, donated the main house, Tree Tops, and its associated land [see HABS No. MD-1105-A].²⁴ At that time she had the Lodge renovated to create her new residence, and kept only a small amount of land containing the secondary buildings of the complex. Helen Woodward Wilson died in 1960.²⁵ Her son and his family had been living on Cape Cod but returned to Washington before Mrs. Wilson's death. In the early 1960s, they moved onto the Wilson property, expanding the Lodge to accommodate their family. Luke W. and Ruth Ferguson Wilson lived there until their deaths in 1985 and 1989, respectively. This final two-acre parcel of land, encompassing the Lodge, the Cabin, the Flat, and the garage and shed, were transferred to the government in August 1993.²⁶

While Luke and Helen Wilson obviously gave careful thought to their first donation of land to the U.S. government in 1935, they could not have anticipated the scope of the enterprise that they were assisting, nor the development that it precipitated. By the 1950s, NIH was one of the preeminent medical research facilities in the world. Its work covered the entire spectrum of research on human disease and had contributed to most of the major medical advances of this century. As the scope of research and the number of institutes continued to grow, so did the need for facilities. In 1949, the government absorbed the adjacent lands owned by the George Freeland Peter family, the Town and Country Golf Club, and the farmlands owned by the Roman Catholic order of the Sisters of the Visitation.²⁷ These acquisitions allowed the continued development of NIH facilities within the open campus setting originally envisioned. Now occupying 317 acres with over 16,000 employees, NIH is the most dominant institutional presence in Bethesda and Montgomery County, and it continues to influence their physical and economic development. The Wilson estate lies at its center.

²²Dorothy Pugh, *National Institutes of Health*, p. 3.

²³Pugh, *The National Institutes of Health*, p. 3.

²⁴Land Records of Montgomery County.

²⁵Obituary of Helen W. Woodward.

²⁶The deed for this and all land transfers is located with the NIH Division of Space and Facility Management.

²⁷Pugh, *The National Institutes of Health*, p. 18.

C. INDIVIDUALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SITE

1. **The owners: Luke I. and Helen W. Wilson:** Luke I. Wilson was born in 1872, the son of a wealthy Chicago retail and manufacturing family. When his father died in 1890, he left his studies at the University of Minnesota to join the operations of the Wilson Brothers clothing firm.²⁸ As manager of the importing arm of the men's furnishings company, he traveled a great deal and is reported to have crossed the ocean 88 times.²⁹ In 1910, Wilson married Helen Woodward, daughter of Samuel Walter Woodward, cofounder of the Washington, D.C., retailing concern, Woodward & Lothrop.

Helen (known to her family as Nellie Clifton) was born in 1877, the eldest of six children.³⁰ She grew up in northwest Washington and was educated at Smith College; she later said that it was there that she developed an interest in medical research.³¹ It was also there that she met Wilson, the cousin of her college roommate. Although they became engaged when Helen was 21, they did not marry for a dozen years because Helen was reluctant to leave her family home in Washington while her mother was in poor health.³² (Mrs. Woodward recuperated, but ultimately died of cancer in 1917.) Following their marriage in 1910, the Wilsons lived in Evanston, Illinois, but apparently maintained strong ties to Washington, where most of Helen's family remained.

While ostensibly Luke and Helen Wilson came to Bethesda to retire, they were just 52 and 47, respectively, with a young son.³³ They established an active business and social life in Washington. Luke was a trustee of Woodward & Lothrop and remained involved in his Chicago firm, Wilson Brothers, as a Director. Locally, he served on the Bethesda Chamber of Commerce³⁴ and was awarded (posthumously) the first Oliver Owen Kuhn Cup in 1938 for his contributions to the development of Bethesda/Chevy Chase.³⁵ He was a member of the Metropolitan Club of Washington and the Chevy Chase Club, two of the city's most prestigious

²⁸Obituary of Luke I. Wilson, *Washington Evening Star*, July 20, 1937.

²⁹"Luke Ingals Wilson," *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, p. 366.

³⁰Guildford, ed., *From Founders to Grandsons: The Story of Woodward & Lothrop*, p. 130.

³¹Obituary of Helen W. Wilson, *Washington Post*, April 9, 1960.

³²Interview with Catherine Woodward Tyssowski, sister of Helen Woodward Wilson, conducted by Tory L. Taylor of Robinson & Associates, Inc., July 26, 1991.

³³Obituaries of Luke I. Wilson and Helen W. Wilson.

³⁴Obituary of Luke I. Wilson.

³⁵"Oliver Owen Kuhn Cup Awarded," *Washington Evening Star*, January 6, 1962, p. B-1.

organizations.³⁶ The estate was also a significant indicator of the Wilsons' stature, and the socializing and entertaining that went on there was important in advancing their political and philanthropic interests. Luke and Helen Wilson traveled a good deal, but the Bethesda property served as a home base, and much of their energy went into developing it.

Luke W. Wilson, the son of Luke I. and Helen W. Wilson, together with his wife Ruth Ferguson Wilson returned to Washington following the death of his mother in 1960. They moved into the Lodge on the estate, expanding the residence substantially through two major additions. They lived on the estate with their two children, Michael William Woodward and Derek David Ferguson Wilson. A freelance writer and researcher specializing in economics and international politics, Luke W. Wilson continued to reside there until his death in 1985. Ruth F. Wilson lived on the property until her death in 1989.

2. **The architects:** Edward Clarence Dean and Arthur B. Heaton: Luke W. Wilson (the son of Luke I. and Helen W.), in an interview conducted in 1985, attributed the design of the estate to architect Edward Clarence Dean, and reported the construction date of the main house as 1926.³⁷ This date and attribution are consistent with a 1926 blueprint drawing for the basement plan of Tree Tops by Dean, located in the papers of Washington architect Arthur B. Heaton at the Library of Congress. There is also a brief reference to a 1926 commission for the Luke I. Wilson residence in the Heaton papers; that Heaton assigned the Wilson residence a job number in his office filing system indicates that there was at least planned involvement on his part; however, no plans or project information has been found to conclusively establish Heaton's role.³⁸ Based on the physical evidence, as the building is similar to his other work (see below), Dean is assumed to be responsible for the original design of the buildings. Given Dean's interest in landscapes, it seems likely that he also the original landscaping plans for the estate, though no documentary evidence has been found, and visual evidence is more difficult to ascertain with the current condition of the landscape. The designs of the original buildings, Top Cottage, Tree Tops, the Lodge, and Cottage #1 certainly are consistent with Dean's career.

The buildings of the Wilson Estate combine many of the influences seen in Dean's diverse and eclectic career. Dean was born in 1879 and raised in Washington, D.C. He received degrees from Yale and Columbia and studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.³⁹ He trained in New York with the firm of Delano and Aldrich and with William Welles Bosworth, as well as for two years under John Russell Pope.⁴⁰ In 1910, he established an office in Washington.

³⁶"Luke Ingals Wilson," *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*.

³⁷Interview with Luke W. Wilson, conducted by Judith H. Robinson of Robinson & Associates, Inc. (dba Tracerics), 1985.

³⁸Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Arthur B. Heaton Papers.

³⁹"Edward Clarence Dean," *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, p. 482.

⁴⁰AIA membership file on Edward C. Dean.

One of his first major commissions, in 1910, was a country house for the Fairchilds called "In the Woods," which has many design similarities to the Wilson Estate. David Fairchild was a renowned horticulturist and a key figure in the field of plant introduction within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. His wife, Marianne, was a sculptor, a daughter of Alexander Graham Bell, and a friend of Dean's from their days as fellow art students in Washington. The Fairchild Estate is evidence that Dean was capable of handling sophisticated and eclectic design influences:

The house is a result of combining four conditions that are exceedingly different and difficult to reconcile -- the desire for living outdoors, the Japanese idea of simplicity, the European characteristic of permanence and the use of American materials. The outdoors spirit is produced in the design by the creation of an outdoor staircase which furnishes access to the outdoors from any bedroom. The house is built on ground level, one step away from the outdoors. From the enclosed terrace a view through the house in two directions is possible. The feeling of Japanese simplicity is expressed through the absence of trim and molding, the decoration on the staircase in the entrance hall, and the wood carving in the wall above the staircase. The European desire for permanence and mellowness is conveyed in the construction through the use of fireproof hollow tile, the stucco covering, the irregular stonework that caps the eaves, and the mellow tone of the walls. The American expression includes American building materials and the relationship of the house to the site.⁴¹

The buildings of the Wilson Estate, in many ways harken back to the design of "In the Woods" that Dean executed more than a dozen years earlier for David Fairchild. The careful consideration of the topography and the rich interplay between interior and exterior spaces are shared by both "In the Woods" and "Tree Tops." Both houses were clearly designed to highlight the planned landscapes. The gardens surrounding "In the Woods" reflected Fairchild's abiding interest in plant introduction and featured many of the plants and trees that he had collected around the world, including most notably, a number of Japanese flowering cherry trees; Fairchild was instrumental in orchestrating the 1912 gift of the cherry trees that line the Tidal Basin in Washington. Dean himself also became very interested in landscape planning and in using exotic plants, as evidenced by some correspondence in the early 1920s concerning Chinese lemon plants and plants of the Udo that Dean requested from the Plant Introduction Station in Glenn Dale, Maryland, a federal quarantine garden that Fairchild had established in 1919.⁴²

⁴¹Thomas McAdam, "In the Woods," *Country Life in America*, New York: Double, Page & Company, October 1914, pp. 48-49, 86-88.

⁴²[no name], Plant Introducer in Charge of Experimenters' Service, to David Bisset, Superintendent of the Plant Introduction Garden, Glenn Dale, March 7, 1923. NARA, RG 54, Entry 135F, Box 4.

The Deans and the Fairchilds maintained a lifelong friendship and Dean designed a couple of houses for the Fairchilds over the course of several decades.⁴³ One of these was designed in the early 1930s, in Miami, where Fairchild had worked for years and where in 1898 he had established the first of the four federal plant introduction stations of the Department of Agriculture. The Fairchilds' Florida house, named "The Campong," was an exotic design employing oriental motifs. Dean subsequently also designed a home in a similar "tropical" style for himself nearby, called "Panther Walk." Dean retired from architecture there with his wife in 1938, spending the rest of his years as a painter.⁴⁴

A few years after designing the first Fairchild house in 1910, Dean was again focusing his practice in New York, although he maintained his office in Washington. He received considerable acclaim for his design of the Cosmopolitan Club of New York in 1917. This design ingeniously linked old but undistinguished houses with a courtyard, cloister, and sitting rooms built of salvaged materials.⁴⁵ The romantic effect suggested an Italian villa that had grown slowly over time. Dean followed this with a larger project, in 1919, called "Turtle Bay Gardens," which he executed in conjunction with William L. Bottomley. The design connected a block of New York houses through their rear yards, where a picturesque common garden was created through the use of pavings, fountains, loggias, and walls. The rear facades of the houses were redesigned to open up the residences to this romantic outlook.⁴⁶ Both of these projects, which won Dean considerable notice in the architectural press, focus on the interplay of interior and exterior spaces and show a talent for landscape design. They also reveal a romantic fascination with the layering of the ages often visible in European architecture that has evolved through the centuries. Most significantly, these projects reveal a consummate skill in adapting and incorporating existing fabric into new and cohesive design forms, a challenge that Dean undertook at the Wilson Estate with the Lodge; there Dean appears to have taken the original masonry first story of a nineteenth-century building and transformed it into a Tudor Revival-style building. He designed it in such a way as to highlight the earlier building, leaving the window openings with keystone arches and incorporating the exposed brick walls as an interior feature.

Dean moved to Greenwich, Connecticut, in the 1920s and became known for his large country houses outside of New York. With these commissions Dean demonstrated his eclectic fluency, drawing from a wide variety of sources but always with an emphasis on materials and craftsmanship. The designs generally looked to European vernacular roots, easily adaptable to the picturesque requirements of a country house while meeting a standard of formality expected

⁴³"In the Woods," National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form; interview with Bert Zuckerman, June 4, 1991.

⁴⁴"Dean," *The National Cyclopaedia*.

⁴⁵Leon V. Solon, "The Cosmopolitan Club, New York," *The Architectural Record*, vol. 46, July 1919, pp. 19-28.

⁴⁶Arthur Willis Colton, "Turtle Bay Gardens," *The Architectural Record*, vol. 48, December 1920, pp. 467-93.

by wealthy American clients. A commission executed for Dr. Walton Martin --recognized in the 1923 exhibition of the Architecture League of New York-- had a strongly French medieval flavor, utilizing rough masonry construction and a walled courtyard to romantic effect. Consistent with the eclecticism in architecture of the time, Dean appears to have worked with a variety of forms, including the popular Colonial and Tudor Revival styles.

The work on the Wilson Estate represents the culmination of Dean's aesthetic interest in the tradition of the English Craft architects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The English vernacular forms, the emphasis on the crafted details, and the quirky combination of building materials, suggesting the slow evolution of the structure, echo some of the work of Sir Edwin Lutyens and Richard Norman Shaw around the turn of the century. Shaw and his contemporaries, championing the rediscovery of England's historic vernacular architecture in all its picturesque beauty, were a primary influence on the American Arts and Crafts movement. Many of the forms and motifs used in the Wilson Estate appear in the designs promoted by Gustav Stickley for American Craftsman bungalows.

Arthur Berthrong Heaton is the other architect who may have had a hand in the early design development of Tree Tops. As mentioned above, in 1926 he assigned the Luke I. Wilson residence a job number in his office files, now located at the Library of Congress. Other than the drawing by Dean, however, there are no papers or architectural designs in the collection related to the Wilson Estate; it is possible that Heaton consulted on the project at a local level capacity, or that he planned to be involved in the project but in fact did not contribute to the design. Another possibility is that certain alterations or portions of the building are attributable to him. Two years later, in 1928, Heaton did design an estate along Rockville Pike -- "Wild Acres," a Tudor Revival-style mansion north of the Wilson Estate, built for Gilbert Grosvenor of the National Geographic Society.⁴⁷

Heaton was born in 1875, also a Washington native. He apprenticed in Washington architectural offices and studied for a short period at the Sorbonne. He established his own office in 1900 and spent his entire professional career in Washington, where he executed hundreds of designs from small residential projects to large commercial buildings. From 1908 to approximately 1922, he served as Supervising Architect of the Washington Cathedral during the early years of its construction.⁴⁸ He was widely known for his large commercial designs, most of which employed classically derived forms.⁴⁹ Heaton was considered a traditionalist and a scholar of American colonial architecture. In addition to his commercial work, he was heavily involved in residential design. During the 1920s, he produced over 500 designs for Shannon & Luchs subdivisions, and executed a number of commissions for large suburban houses. The National Geographic Society

⁴⁷Heaton Papers at the Library of Congress.

⁴⁸Bushong, Robinson and Mueller, *A Centennial History of the Washington Chapter: American Institute of Architects*, p. 130.

⁴⁹"The 38th Annual Exhibition of the Architectural League of New York," *American Architect*, February 14, 1923, pp. 139-52.

Building of 1930 is among his most noted commissions.

PART II. DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

A. PHYSICAL CHARACTER OF THE SITE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT:

1. **Physical description of the site:** The large Wilson estate occupies a highly variable topographic area with old growth trees and heavy underbrush. At the epicenter is Tree Tops, the name of the estate now applied to the main house, set upon a knoll at the site's highest point. Originally a curvilinear driveway lead from Rockville Pike and wound through the trees and circle's the house before terminating at the north facade; this route was obviously designed to provide for a variety of vistas as one approached the home. Portions of the drive remain on the estate. The main house remains the primary residence and focus of the site. Set below the main house at a lower elevation across a slight gully to the southwest is the Lodge, the largest of several support buildings and guest cottages. It is generally not visible from the main house, and faces west. Located close to and just north of the Lodge is the Flat, a building that originally served as a garage and staff quarters of Tree Tops and later the Lodge. Directly behind the Flat to the west is a four-bay garage and work shed, with a storage shed located across the driveway to the north. Across a small meadow from the Lodge to the west is a cottage known as the Cabin, facing east. Located a fair distance to the northwest of this grouping is another dwelling, known as Building 15A, with its own access driveway leading to West Drive. It was a small neighboring estate, and was associated with the Wilson estate for a short period, between 1930 and 1938. In 1938, the house formed part of the third parcel the Wilsons donated to NIH. The various outbuildings and cottages associated with the estate are all connected by a series of driveways and stone walkways. Indications of landscaping features are evident within the ornamental plantings around each building.

2. **Surrounding environment:** The campus of the National Institutes of Health completely surrounds the Wilson estate, which is located off Cedar Lane on the west side of Rockville Pike. Constructed beginning in the late 1930s and 1940s, the NIH campus consists mostly of large, brick, Georgian Revival-style administration and laboratory buildings. The Wilson Estate is bordered on the west by West Drive and on the south by Center Drive, two of the main arteries of the campus. To the north of the Wilson Estate, in a small hollow of land just south of Cedar Lane, is a cluster of officers' quarters; these small brick houses, situated around a cul-de-sac, are modeled after typical military housing stock. Towering over the Wilson Estate to the south of Center Drive is the Clinical Center. Building 4, one of the original buildings of the administrative quadrangle, sits across Center Drive to the southeast of the Wilson Estate. To the west of the Wilson Estate lies Building 31, the administrative headquarters of the Division of Research Resources. The buildings of NIH are connected by a network of drives and streets on a rolling topographic site, with old growth trees and new landscaping combined to create a collegiate campus effect.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. **Original architectural drawings:** Arthur B. Heaton Papers at the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

B. **General Depositories:**

American Institute of Architects, membership files.

Maryland National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (MNCPPC), historic sites files on Cedarcroft.

Montgomery County Historical Society, vertical files.

Montgomery County Land Records, Montgomery County Administration Building, Rockville, MD.

Montgomery County Property Assessment Maps, Montgomery County Administration Building, Rockville, MD.

NIH Division of Space and Facility Management, Deed and Land Records, Building Maintenance Records.

National Library of Medicine, photograph collection of the National Institutes of Health.

C. **Historic views:**

1. **From the Montgomery County Historical Society:**

“Tree Tops from the south, 1930s.”

“View From the south of Tree Tops in the Snow, 1930s.”

“Entrance to the Wilson Estate off of Rockville Pike, 1930s.”

2. **From National Library of Medicine Collection:**

16617 "1939 view, cottage"

14986 "1960 Top Cottage dwarfed by new construction"

14554 "1938 Mrs. Luke Wilson posing with steam shovel at groundbreaking"

14948 "1959 view of Tree Tops"

D. INTERVIEWS:

Tom Cook, retired director of the NIH Buildings and Grounds Division, conducted by Tory L. Taylor, Robinson & Associates, Inc., August 1, 1991.

Ray Gauzza, historian conducting research Montgomery County estates, conducted by Judith Robinson, Robinson & Associates, Inc., December 7, 1984.

Dorothy Pugh, author of a history of NIH (recalling her 1987 interview with Ruth Ferguson Wilson), conducted by Tory L. Taylor, Robinson & Associates, Inc., June 12, 1991.

Catherine Woodward Tyssowski, sister of Helen Woodward Wilson, conducted by Tory L. Taylor, Robinson & Associates, Inc., July 26, 1991.

Luke Woodward Wilson, son of Luke I. and Helen Woodward Wilson, conducted by Judith H. Robinson, Robinson & Associates, Inc., 1985.

Michael William Woodward Wilson, grandson of Luke I. and Helen Woodward Wilson, conducted by Tory L. Taylor, Robinson & Associates, Inc., August 7, 1991.

Bert Zuckerman, historian researching "the Campong," the David Fairchild residence in Miami designed by Edward Clarence Dean (now the Fairchild Research Center), conducted by Tory L. Taylor, Robinson & Associates, Inc., June 4, 1991.

E. BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. **Primary and unpublished sources**

Gauzza, Roy H., and George J. Andreve. "In The Woods," the David Fairchild Estate, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form*. May 1978.

Robinson & Associates, Inc. (dba Tracerics) with Dalton, Dalton, Newport. *The NIH Master Plan, Phase I, Task 5, Part II: Cultural Asset Inventory, Architectural Significance, Final Submittal*. September 17, 1985.

Robinson & Associates, Inc. *Preliminary Historical Assessment of the Wilson Estate*. Final Report for the Clinical Center Complex Infrastructure Modernization and Improvement Program. September 1991.

Robinson & Associates, Inc. "The Wilson Estate," *National Institutes of Health Historic Resources Inventory Form*. November 15, 1995.

Thompson, L.R. "Development of the National Institute of Health from 1930 to 1938" (letter enclosed in the cornerstone of the NIH administration building). Bethesda, MD, 1938.

2. Secondary and published sources

a. Periodicals

"Clinical Center Observes 20th Anniversary," *The NIH Record*. July 3, 1973.

Colton, Arthur Willis. "Turtle Bay Gardens, New York City," *The Architectural Record*. Vol. 48, no. 6, December 1920, pp. 467-493.

"Helen Wilson, Daughter of Woodie's Founder," *Washington Post*. April 9, 1960.

"House of Bayard Barnes, Esq., New Haven, Connecticut," *American Architect*. Vol. 110, no. 2124, September 6, 1916.

"Luke I. Wilson, 65, is Taken by Death," *The Washington Evening Star*. July 20, 1937, B5.

"Luke Woodward Wilson," *Washington Post*. May 3, 1985.

McGuckian, Eileen. "Drive in 1930 Leads South Past Country Estates," *Rockville Gazette*. December 23, 1987, p. 13.

McGuckian, Eileen. "Pub, School and Mansion Highlight a Nostalgic Tour," *Rockville Gazette*. December 16, 1987, p. 23.

"Mrs. Wilson, 83; Father Founded Woodward's," *The Washington Evening Star*. April 9, 1960.

"Oliver Owen Kuhn Cup Awarded," *The Washington Evening Star*. January 6, 1962, p. B-1.

"Portfolio of Current Architecture," *The Architectural Record*. Vol. 69, February 1931, pp. 103-106.

Pugh, Dorothy. "The National Institutes of Health: A Bethesda Landmark Celebrates Its Centennial," *The Montgomery County Story*. February 1987, vol. 30, pp. 247-261.

Solon, Leon V. "The Cosmopolitan Club, New York," *The Architectural Record*. Vol. 46, July 1919, pp. 19-28.

"The 38th Annual Exhibition of the Architectural League of New York",
American Architect. February 14, 1923, Vol. 123, no. 2413, pp. 139-152.

"Top Cottage Crowded Out," *The Record* (NIH newsletter). November 22,
1960.

b. Books

Bradley, Gertrude D. *Bethesda Not So Old*. Gaithersburg, MD: Franklin Press,
1956.

Bushong, William; Robinson, Judith Helm; and Mueller, Julie. *A Centennial
History of the Washington Chapter: The American Institute of Architects*.
Washington, DC: The Washington Architectural Foundation Press, 1987.

Guildford, Martha C., ed. *From Founders to Grandsons: The Story of
Woodward & Lothrop*. Washington, DC: Woodward & Lothrop Public
Relations Division, 1955.

MacMaster, Richard K. and Hiebert, Ray Eldon. *A Grateful Remembrance: The
Story of Montgomery County, Maryland*. Rockville, MD: Montgomery Co.
Government and Montgomery Co. Historical Society, 1976.

McGuckian, Eileen S. *Historic and Architectural Guide to the Rockville Pike*.
Rockville, MD: Peerless Rockville Historic Preservation, Ltd., 1995.

The Montgomery County Planning Board of the Maryland-National Capital Park
and Planning Commission. *Locational Atlas & Index of Historic Sites in
Montgomery County Maryland*. October 1976.

The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography.

National Institutes of Health. *Guide to NIH*. Bethesda, MD: 1987.

National Institutes of Health. *NIH Almanac*. NIH Publication #86-5, Division
of Public Information. September 1986.

Offutt, William. *Bethesda: A Social History*. Bethesda, MD: 1995.

The Social List of Washington, D.C. Washington, DC: Helen Ray Hagner Social
Bureau, Inc., 1932.

c. Maps

Deets, Edward H. and Maddox, Charles J. *Real Estate Atlas of Montgomery County, Maryland*. Rockville, MD: 1917.

Hopkins, G.M. *Atlas of Fifteen Miles Around Washington*. Philadelphia, 1879.

Klinge, Frank H.M. *Atlas of Montgomery County*. Landsdale, PA: 1931, 1935, 1941.

E. Likely sources not yet investigated: Additional information on the Wilson family use of the estate will be synthesized and deposited at the Historical Office on the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland. It will include information provided by Deborah Wilson, daughter-in-law of Luke W. Wilson, in an oral interview conducted in late summer of 1997, and copies of historic photographs currently owned by the Wilson family.

A large collection of papers, files, and general corporate history surrounding the establishment and history of the Woodward and Lothrop department store chain was recently donated to the Historical Society of Washington, D.C. It has not been fully indexed or organized by the society, and may contain additional photographs or references to the Wilsons and the Wilson estate.

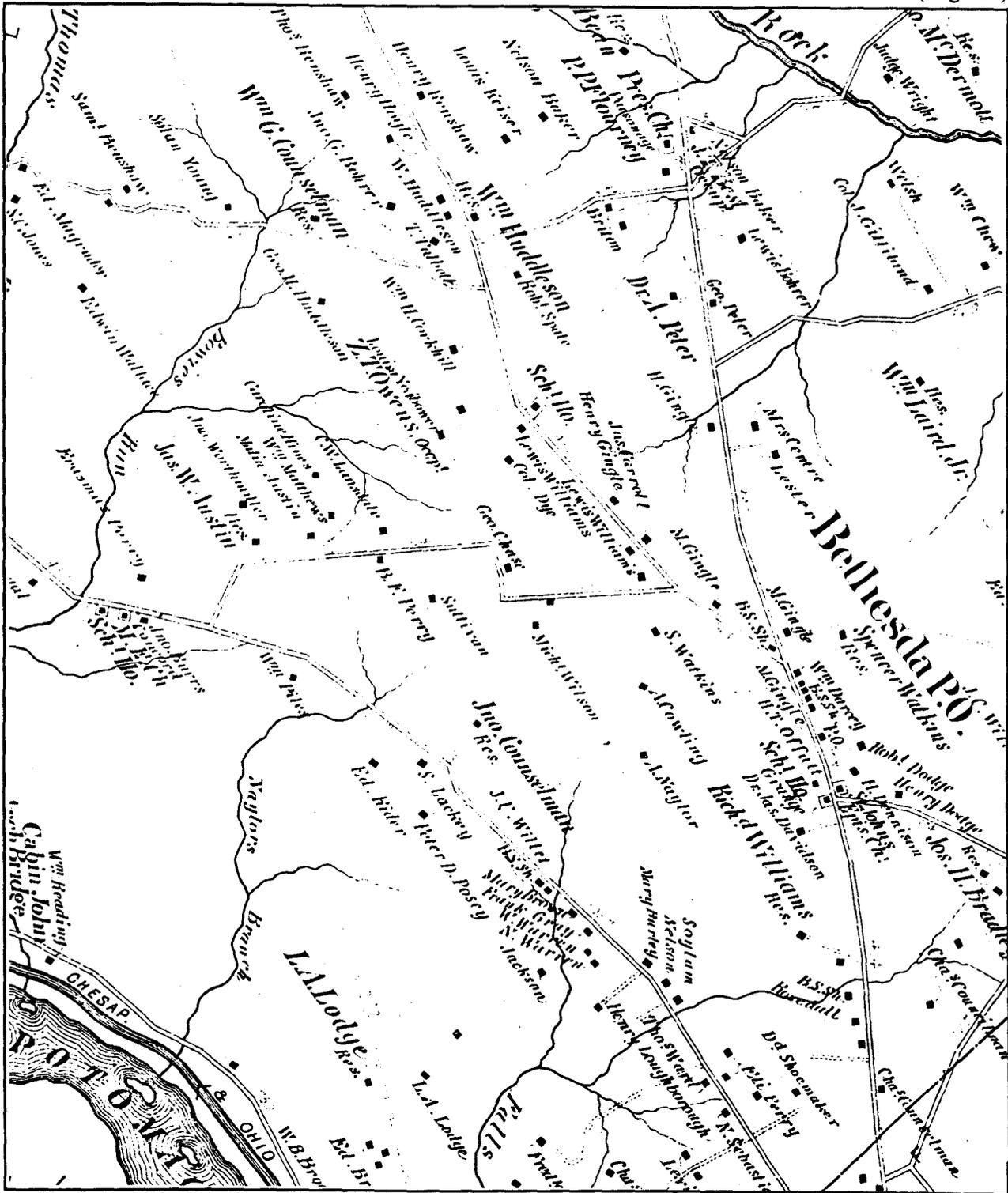
F. Supplemental material: None

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

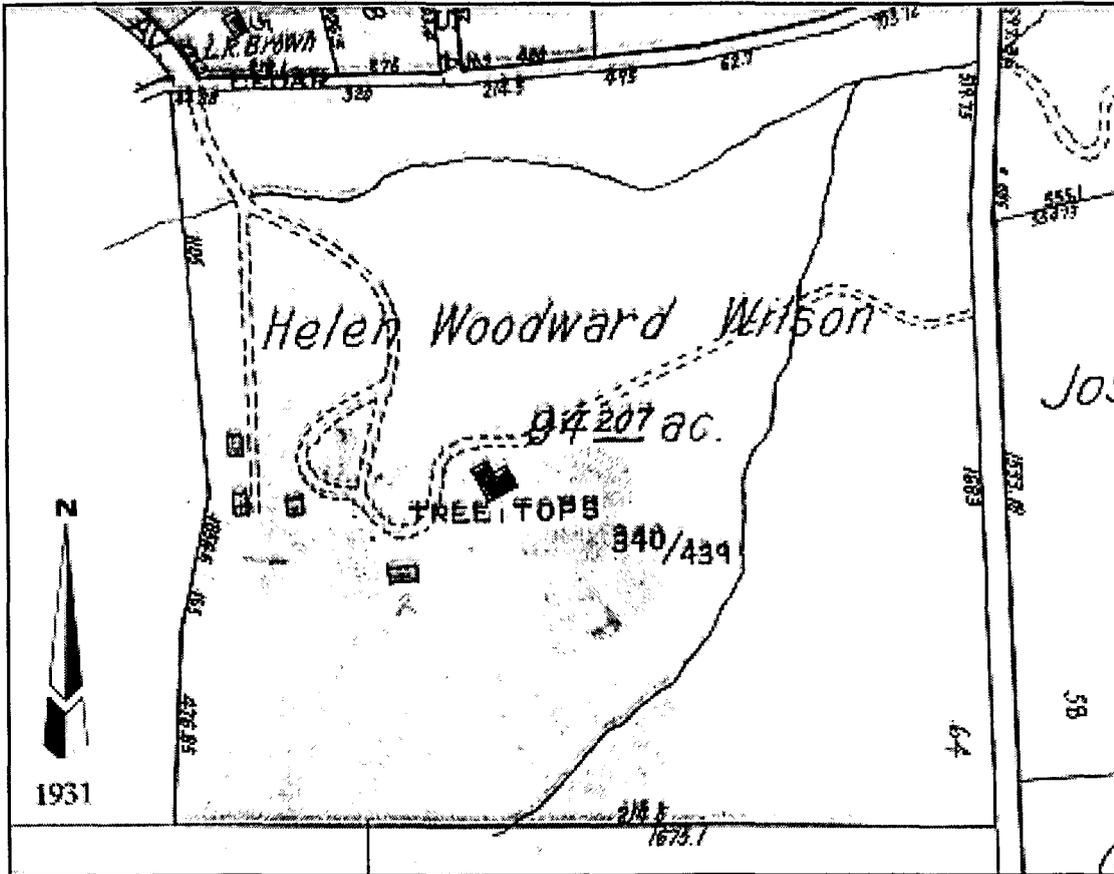
The National Institutes of Health plans to construct an 850,000-square-foot addition to the Clinical Center, the first step in a renovation of the original building, which was built over 40 years ago. As part of the Clinical Center expansion, a number of buildings of the Wilson Estate (including the Lodge, the Cabin, the Flat, and the garage and shed) will be demolished. These buildings were found eligible in 1996 as part of a historic district encompassing the Wilson Estate. Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800, regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470f), the National Institutes of Health has consulted with the Maryland Historical Trust and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and have entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with those parties that requires completion of HABS documentation of the Wilson Estate before demolition. This documentation was conducted in May-June of 1997. Following the complete documentation of the estate, NIH intends to demolish several of the buildings associated with the site.

The photographs were taken by Walter A. Smalling, Jr.

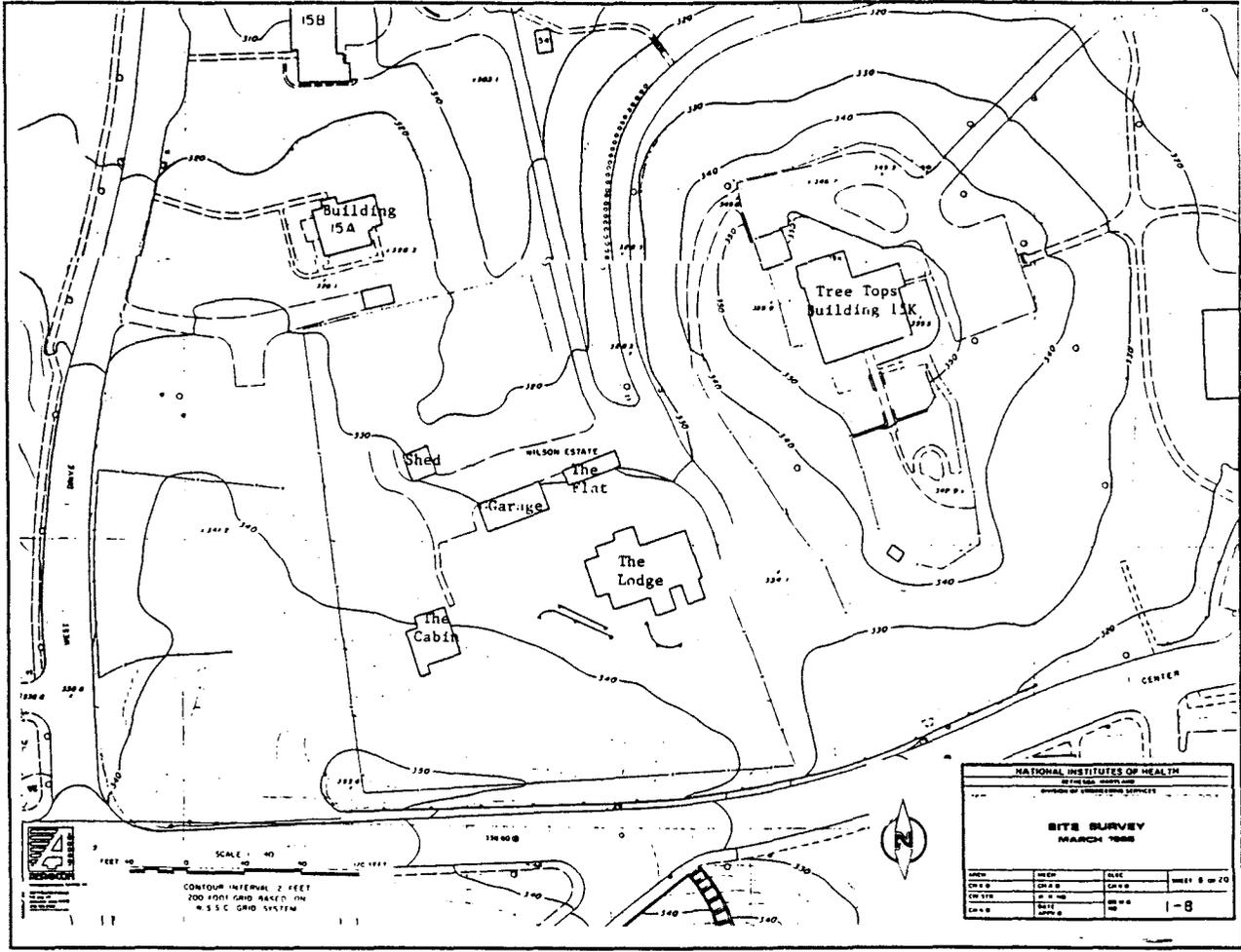
Prepared By: Paul K. Williams, Heather P. Ewing
Title: Architectural Historians
and Judith H. Robinson
Title: Principal
Affiliation: Robinson & Associates, Inc.
Date: July 1997



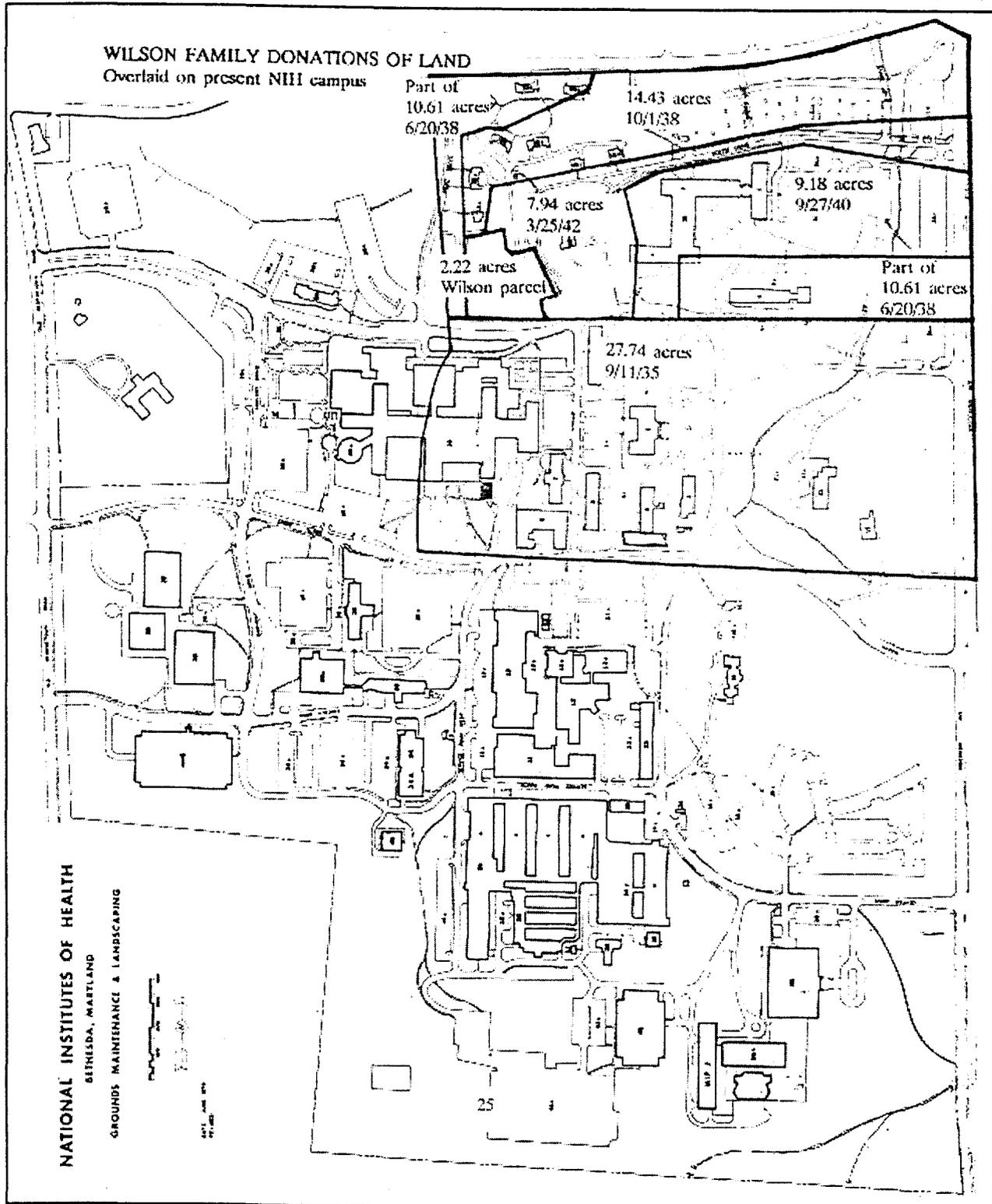
Map showing Briton [sic] Farm along Rockville Pike, before Wilson ownership, 1879. Source: G. M. Hopkins, *Atlas of Fifteen Miles Around Washington*, Philadelphia, 1879.



Map of Tree Tops estate. Source: Frank H.M. Klinge, *Atlas of Montgomery County*, Landsdale, PA, 1931.



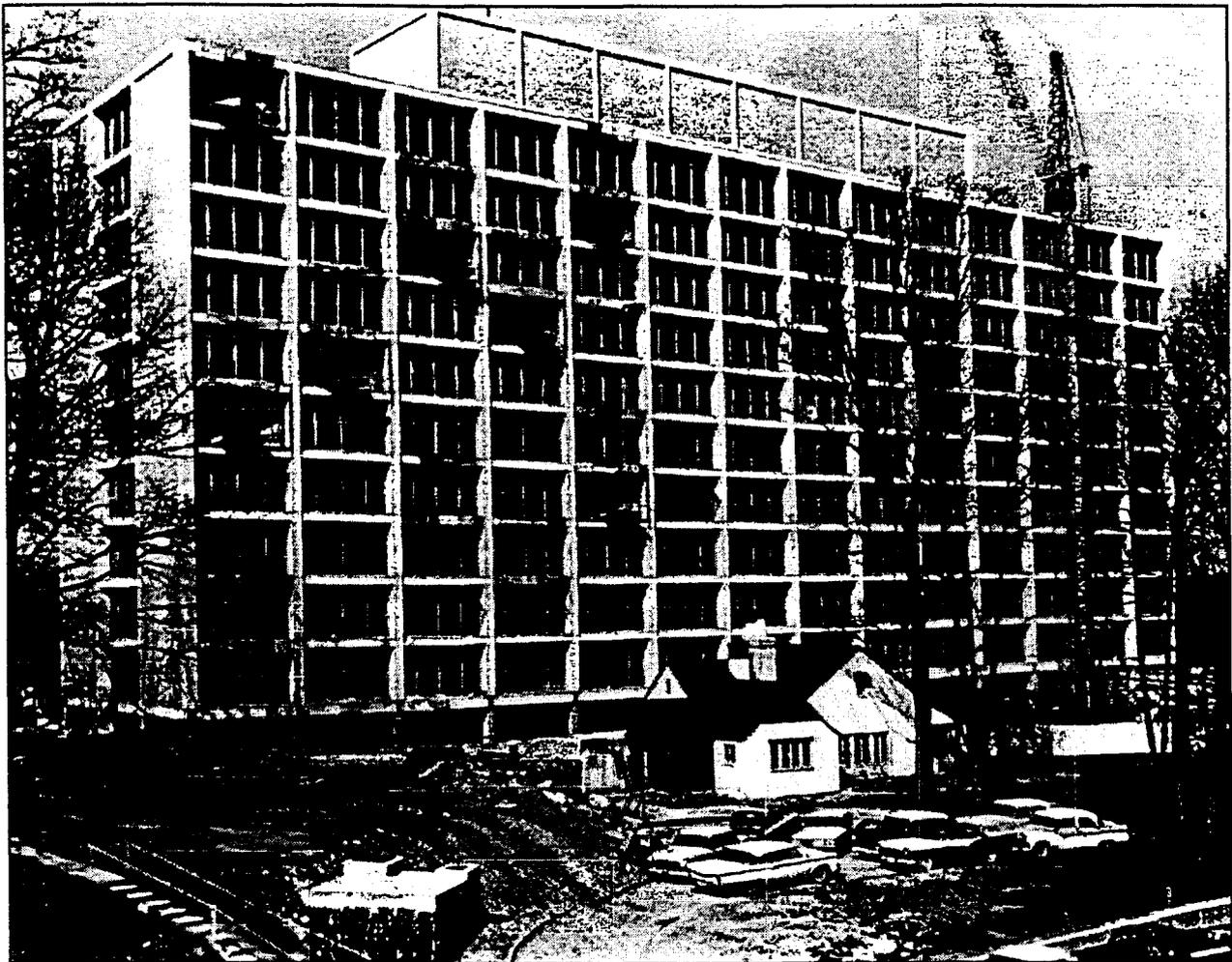
Tree Tops estate site plan. Source: NIH Site Survey, Division of Engineering Services, March 1985.



Wilson family donations of land to NIH. Source: Preliminary Historical Assessment of the Wilson Estate, prepared for NIH by Robinson & Associates, Inc., September 1991.



Helen Wilson and steam shovel, NIH groundbreaking ceremony, 1938. Source: National Library of Medicine.



Top Cottage during the construction of Building 31, 1960. Source: National Library of Medicine photo collection.