

Filoli (Bourn-Roth Estate)  
Canada Road  
Woodside  
San Mateo County  
California

HABS No. CA-2117

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CAL,  
41-WOOD,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FILOLI (BOURN-ROTH ESTATE)

HABS No. CA-2117<sup>1</sup>-

Location: Canada Road, Woodside, San Mateo County, California.  
Present Owner: National Trust for Historic Preservation.  
Significance: Designed by the prominent California architect Willis J. Polk, this skillful adaptation of Provincial Georgian architecture, surrounded by sixteen acres of elaborate formal gardens, remains one of the most triumphantly sumptuous of all the Peninsula's great houses.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1915-1918. Plans in the San Mateo County Historical Association are dated September 28, 1915.
2. Architect: Willis J. Polk.

Willis Jefferson Polk (1867-1924), A. I. A., was prominently known in the San Francisco Bay area during two decades of practice, 1904-24. After working in St. Louis and San Francisco and studying in Paris, he entered the Chicago office of Daniel H. Burnham. In 1904 he established his own office in San Francisco. Following the earthquake and fire of April 18, 1906, he was active in re-building the city. His work in San Francisco includes: First National Bank, remodeling of the James Flood mansion, enlargement of the Mills Building, Cuyler-Lee Building, Halladie Building, St. Mary's Hospital, Hobart Office Building, Swedenborgian Church, Frederick Building, and the restoration of the Mission Delores. He also designed many of the finest residences in San Francisco and throughout the Peninsula.

3. Landscape architect: The sixteen-acre garden was designed by Bruce Porter and completed by 1920.
4. Alterations and additions: The house has been little altered since its completion in 1918. In 1917-18, Arthur Brown, Jr., of Bakewell and Brown, finished the plans by the addition of the service and garage portion, the garden pavilion, the gardener's house, etc. In 1928 a two-story wrought-iron porch, designed by James Mitchell, was added on the north side of the house.

B. Historical events and personages: William Bowers Bourn II, the original owner of Filoli, was born in San Francisco in 1857. Following his father's death in 1874, he developed the family's Empire Mine at Grass Valley. Bourn married and had two children, a son who died in infancy and a daughter, Maud, who died in 1929, leaving two children from her marriage.

Bourn became president of the San Francisco Gas Company and the Spring Valley Water Company. The large Greystone Winery near St. Helena in Napa County was also built for him. Mr. Bourn later bought the fabled Lakes of Killarney, a 16,000-acre Muchcross estate in Ireland for his daughter and son-in-law. In 1932 this was donated to the Irish Free State. William Bourn was confined to his estate after being stricken with paralysis in 1922. Bourn was a philosopher who extolled the virtues of "constructive conservatism" and the works of Goethe and Browning. Under titles like "Thoughts on Character," Bourn wrote articles for his company's periodicals.

In 1938, the estate was sold to Mr. and Mrs. William P. Roth who are associated with the Matson Navigation Company and its famous "White Ships." Mr. Roth died in 1963, and the estate was maintained by Mrs. Roth. In 1975 she gave the house and gardens to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

## PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

### A. Primary and unpublished sources:

Deed Books, San Mateo County Recorder's Office, Hall of Records, Redwood City, California.

### B. Secondary sources:

#### 1. Books:

Lewis, Oscar, Here Lived the Californians (New York: Rinehardt and Company, Inc., 1957), p. 230.

Olmsted, Roger R., sponsored by the San Francisco Junior League, Inc., Here Today (Chronicle Books, 1968), p. 193-7.

Regnery, Dorothy F., An Enduring Heritage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), pp. 110-113.

Williams, Henry Lionel and Williams, Attalie K., Treasury of Great American Houses (New York: G. P. Putman Sons, 1970), pp. 174-183.

#### 2. Newspapers, etc.:

San Mateo County Library, San Mateo, California, Clippings.

San Mateo County Historical Association, College of San Mateo, San Mateo, California:

72-65 Clippings  
948 Documents  
67-58 Manuscripts

68-110 Pamphlet of Garden Tours  
69-10 Pamphlet of Junior Leagues  
69-68 History of Bourn  
71-13 Family  
67-65 Photographs

Prepared by: R. Patrick Christopher  
Project Historian  
Historic American Buildings Survey  
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored jointly by the National Park Service and the Junior League of Palo Alto. Recorded under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1974 at the Historic American Buildings Survey field office at the Latham-Hopkins Gatehouse, Menlo Park, California. Project supervisor was Kim Spurgeon (Assistant Professor of Architecture, Kansas State University); the project historian was R. Patrick Christopher (Columbia University); and the student architects were Stephen Farneth (Carnegie Mellon University), Robert Randall (University of Houston), Aino Vieira da Rosa (University of Oregon), and Amy Weinstein (University of Pennsylvania). The written data were edited by Dorothy F. Regnery in San Mateo County in 1975 and by Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Historian, in February 1983.