

4.2 Foxhill, 1480 Old Kennett Road (CRS #N-3859)

Description

Built in 1932 with later additions, Foxhill is a Colonial Revival-style country house designed by architect G. Morris Whiteside, II. The house has a central, five-bay, two-and-a-half-story block with flanking three-bay wings and later additions (see Plates 4.7-4.10). The main block and wings are faced with fieldstone and have a side gable roof with slate shingles. A denticulated brick cornice fashioned using stretchers and headers extends beneath the eaves. The central block (Plate 4.8) has three gabled dormers and fieldstone chimneys with brick and stone caps in the former gable ends. The west-facing front façade has central paired wood panel doors with leaded glass transom set



Plate:
4.7

Photo View:
East

Photographer:
Jennifer Leynes

Date:
January 9, 2009

Foxhill, 1480 Old Kennett Road.



Plate:
4.8

Photo View:
East

Photographer:
Jennifer Leynes

Date:
January 9, 2009

Main Block, Foxhill. This section of the house was constructed in 1932, with the flanking wings added in 1941. Note the brick cornice and detailed door surround.



Plate:
4.9

Photo View:
West

Photographer:
Jennifer Leynes

Date:
January 9, 2009

Rear elevation, Foxhill. Note the additions to the north wing (at left) and south wing (at right). The semi-elliptical retaining wall is visible in the foreground.



Plate:
4.10

Photo View:
Northeast

Photographer:
Jennifer Leynes

Date:
January 9, 2009

Garage, Foxhill. This modern three-car garage is located at the north end of the house, opposite the basement-level garage in the north wing. The stone gateposts in the foreground bear the date 1990.

within a recessed wood panel entry; the elaborate wood surround features a segmental arch pediment with modillions and a frieze band with triglyphs supported on pilasters. Windows are 6/9 double-hung sash with paneled shutters on the first floor and 6/6 sash with louvered shutters on the second; all windows have simple wood surrounds and sills. The east elevation is nearly identical to the front façade (Plate 4.9); notable differences include paneled wood spandrels beneath first floor windows and a simplified door surround featuring a flat entablature with keystone. The paired doors are half-glazed and flanked by wood shutters.

The three-bay gabled wings are set back from the main block and are two stories in height. Windows vary and include 9/9, 6/9, and 6/6 double-hung sash. The north wing has an entrance on its front façade containing a half-glazed door and transom set within a simple wood surround flanked by paneled shutters. The north wing's gable peak has an oval inset featuring a large letter "S" curving around the letters "F" and "W" and flanked by the dates "1932" and "1941."¹ The house has two frame additions clad in beadboard siding, one at the gable end of the south wing and the other at the rear of the north wing (see Plate 4.9).

Foxhill is located on a hilltop accessed from Old Kennett Road by a long, curving asphalt driveway lined with iron light posts. A circular drive of cement pavers is located in front of the house, from which a secondary driveway extends downhill to a gated entry on Snuff Mill Road. Stone walls enclose the garage area at the north end of the building; the gateposts have concrete urns and inset panels with the letter "P" flanked by the numbers "19" and "90."² A modern three-car garage, one-and-one-half-stories tall, is located north of the house; the structure has beadboard siding and fieldstone foundation. Stone retaining walls contain a stairway leading from the garage area to the backyard. The east elevation has a flagstone patio that extends across the main block. The backyard has a semi-elliptical terrace with stone retaining walls and a modern swimming pool at its south end. A grassy lawn sweeps downhill from the terrace.

Applicable Historic Context

Piedmont Zone; Urbanization and Early Suburbanization, 1880-1940 ±; Settlement Patterns and Demographic Change; Architecture, Engineering and Decorative Arts.

¹ The "S" is for Springer, and the "F" and "W" for Frederika and William, the property owners. The dates refer to the original construction in 1932 and addition of the wings in 1941.

² Richard C. Porter, II, and his wife Elizabeth purchased the Springer House in 1988 from the Springers' daughter. The Porters were responsible for the construction of the detached garage and adjacent retaining walls in 1990. They may also have made one of the frame additions.

Evaluation

Frederika Nesbitt Springer purchased the 12.62-acre lot on the east side of Snuff Mill Road in 1932 and built Foxhill with her husband, William Lobdell Springer, in the same year (NCCRD 1932). William Springer was the son of a prominent Wilmington surgeon, Dr. Harold Love Springer, and his wife Carolyn Lobdell, whose family owned the Lobdell Car Wheel Company in Wilmington. Founded in the 1830s, the company manufactured chilled cast iron products, including railroad car wheels, and was the largest of its kind by 1860 (Bergane 1976: 2-5). The Springers were active in Wilmington society as members of the Wilmington Club and Vicmead Hunt Club. They also shared an interest in the colonial period with memberships in the Sons of Colonial Wars of Delaware, Sons of the American Revolution, and Society of Colonial Dames (*The Evening Journal* 1987; Rudolph 1935: 187; *The Morning News* 1983).

The Springers' purchase of land in the rural area near Centreville for construction of a country estate was indicative of a larger trend in the area. During the early twentieth century, Delaware's wealthiest residents, led by members of the du Pont family, built large country estates in the rolling countryside outside of Wilmington (Chase et al. 1992: 22). The estates were built over several decades and included houses in a variety of architectural styles designed by architects of local and national repute. Collectively, the estates "form Delaware's most famous architectural legacy, sometimes called Chateau Country" (Maynard 2008: 19).

The country house movement was not unique to Delaware but rather part of a national trend that focused near urban centers like New York and Philadelphia. Although it had its origins in the nineteenth-century writings of Andrew Jackson Downing, the American country house movement of the early twentieth century focused on creating show places for the display of wealth and gentility. The use of technology to improve the comfort and convenience of the residents was central to the movement, as was the emphasis on leisure, with estates designed to accommodate and entertain guests through provision of amenities like tennis courts, swimming pools, and horses for hunting and riding. Gardens and conservatories were also common hallmarks of the country houses of the period, and many estate owners developed model farms on their properties (Kise Franks & Straw 1992: 17).

The Philadelphia region, including the Brandywine Valley, was one of the centers of the movement (Aslet 1990: 87). A distinctive regional architecture for country houses, drawing on the vernacular traditions of farmhouses in rural Pennsylvania and Delaware, emerged in Philadelphia in the 1880s and thrived until the Great Depression:

Combining the materials and basic massing of the early Pennsylvania houses with a sensibility borrowed from modern English work, the architects of this regional

school made an identifiable new architecture, creating beautiful and compelling twentieth-century country houses (Hewitt 1990: 198).

One of the reasons the Philadelphia country houses assumed a distinctive identity was the conservative and insular society maintained by the homeowners and architects. Perhaps because of the region's deep associations with colonial America, most wealthy residents sought to identify with their ancestors; some did so through the preservation and expansion of historic family farms, while others built new country houses, often with an accompanying "gentleman's farm" to facilitate the connection with the past (Hewitt 1990: 198).

The architects of the Philadelphia school understood and promoted this connection between their clients and the past. Led by firms like Mellor, Meigs and Howe, whose principals Walter Mellor and Arthur Ingersoll Meigs were themselves from wealthy Philadelphia families, these professionals formed a close-knit group that actively engaged and interacted with one another (Hewitt 1990: 198). According to author Mark Alan Hewitt:

[T]he T-Square Club was the epicenter of architectural ideas in Philadelphia during the eclectic era. From before the war into the late 1920s T-Square published its annual exhibition... featuring the work of architects and artists in concert and publishing travel sketches, student projects, and articles on architectural history. It was an idealistic and insular group, full of the romantic views of architecture that were held by modern Ruskinians in England. The domestic work its members produced had a focus and stylistic coherence testifying to the hothouse atmosphere that must have prevailed in its meetings (Hewitt 1990: 199).

As a group, the Philadelphia school honored the vernacular building traditions of the region and, in their best work, seamlessly integrated their residential designs into the rural landscape (Hewitt 1990: 206).

Estate development outside Wilmington was led by the du Pont family, which began building houses near the Du Pont Powder Company's mills on the Brandywine River during the nineteenth century. The number of country houses in the Christiana Hundred increased dramatically after World War I, when wartime profits made millionaires of many du Pont family members, and continued into the 1920s and 1930s, as the company's diversification and reorganization made fortunes for the family and many of their executives and business associates (Maynard 2008: 19-20; Kise Franks & Straw 1992: 19). Typical of country houses in the region, these Delaware businessmen often built in styles that created a connection with their ancestors; in the case of the du Ponts, designs reflecting the family's French heritage were most popular. The names selected for the family's estates – e.g., Nemours, Chevannes, Granogue – also suggested the family's identification with its past (Maynard 2008: 62).

In many cases, the du Pont homes were erected on larger estates – often 500 acres or more – than country houses in other areas of the Mid-Atlantic (Maynard 2008: 62). The Christiana Hundred was overwhelmingly populated by American country houses by the end of World War II, primarily on estates of 40 acres or more (Robertson n.d.). Many smaller estates were also erected in the area, including several on the south side of Old Kennett Road in the vicinity of Snuff Mill Road: the Ives-du Pont House (ca. 1928), Lauritsen House (ca. 1930), and Foxhill (1932).

Notable architects designed the country houses of the du Ponts and their business associates in the Christiana Hundred and elsewhere in New Castle County. Alfred I. du Pont commissioned nationally prominent firm Carrere and Hastings to design Nemours and its gardens in 1909-1910; other notable architects who designed country houses in the area included Mellor, Meigs and Howe (Bramshott); Albert Spahr (Granogue); Albert Ely Ives (Chevannes, Ives-du Pont House, Lauritsen House); Clay McClure and Alexander James Harper (Archmere); and Laussat Richter Rogers (Walnut Hill) (Kise Franks & Straw 1992: 18; Lidz 2006: 4-5). Of these, Ives, McClure and Harper, and Rogers were all based in Delaware (Hewitt 1990: 199).

The Springers hired another Delaware architect, G. Morris Whiteside, II, to design their new home (Centreville Civic Association, Inc. 2001: 126). Born in Philadelphia in 1884, Whiteside earned a degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1905. He studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and at the American Academy in Rome before forming a partnership with Walter Stewart Brown in Wilmington in 1910. Brown & Whiteside were responsible for a wide array of projects in the state, including houses, schools, clubhouses, museums, banks, hospitals, and churches. The firm was the state's largest at the time of Brown's death in 1931 (Maynard 2008: 17, 163; Tatman 2006b).

After Brown's death, Whiteside established his own firm under the name G. Morris Whiteside, II. Whiteside continued to work independently until 1956, when Whiteside, Moeckel & Carbonell was organized. This firm is still operating in Wilmington under the name Moeckel & Carbonell³ (Bevan 1929: 40-41; Tatman 2006b; Moeckel Carbonell Associates, Inc. n.d.). Whiteside's firms combined to design 1,147 projects during his long career. His obituary described him as "an architect who placed an indelible stamp on the face of Delaware," citing projects as diverse as the First and Central Presbyterian Church, Atlas Chemical Industries Office, Wilmington Trust Building, Wilmington High School, Tower Hill School, and Eastlake Housing Project, all in Wilmington. Other notable

³ Moeckel & Carbonell was contacted in April 2009 regarding Foxhill; however, no response was received.

commissions included buildings at the Dover Air Force Base and Delaware State Hospital (*Evening Journal* 1963).

In addition to his prolific design career, Whiteside was actively involved in professional organizations and in the Wilmington community. In 1932, he organized the Delaware chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA); he also remained involved in the prominent T-Square Club in Philadelphia (Maynard 2008: 17; Bevan 1929: 41). Locally, Whiteside assumed an active role in the City of Wilmington, serving on the Zoning Commission (1930-1946) and the Mayor's City Planning Commission (1935), and served as president of the Delaware State Housing Commission (1930-1932) and the Delaware Board of Architectural Registration (1935-1937) (Tatman 2006b).

Whiteside designed the Colonial Revival-style residence for the Springers as a five-bay symmetrical façade with a central entrance surmounted by a segmental pediment on the west-facing front. The east elevation was nearly identical except for the doorway, which had a flat entablature. Elegantly sited at the top of a hill, the building was significantly expanded by the addition of flanking three-bay wings in 1941. Although the architect of the additions is undocumented, the similarities in design suggest that Whiteside was also involved in this project. The wings are set back from the central block and are faced with fieldstone. The north wing bears the initials of the owners and the dates 1932 and 1941 in the gable peak.

The Springers lived at Foxhill until their deaths, Frederika in 1983 and William in 1987. The property passed to their only child, who sold Foxhill to Richard C. and Elizabeth Porter, owners of a car dealership in Newark, in 1988 (NCCRD 1988). The Porters erected the detached three-car garage (Plate 4.10) on the property in 1990 and may have made the first frame addition to the house. The property's current owners, Stephen M. and Janine Marrone, acquired Foxhill in 1999 and commissioned an addition to the house in 2000 (NCCRD 1999). The title search is summarized in Table 4.3.

Historical research identified American country houses as an expected property type within the APE. These houses are typically architect-designed, high-style dwellings; often constructed on sizeable parcels of land, the estates may have swimming pools, tennis courts, and other facilities associated with the leisure pursuits of the residents. Eligibility for the National Register under Criterion A requires a clear association with the American country house movement as demonstrated by the property's location, social status of its builders, and involvement of an architect in its design. Country houses eligible under Criterion B were either constructed by or built for persons significant in the community on the local, state, or national level. Properties significant

under Criterion C are outstanding examples of an architectural style or the work of a master architect.

Table 4.3: Title History, 1480 Old Kennett Road (Tax Parcel # 0700500017).

CHAIN OF TITLE FOR PARCEL # 0700500017				
DATE	GRANTOR	GRANTEE	INSTRUMENT LIBER/PAGE	COMMENTS
2/24/1927	Charles Franklin and Rosa N. Combs	John M. & Emily T. Buffington	V34/138	17 ac. with building (Michael Kane House)
3/17/1932	John W. & Emily T. Buffington	Fredrika N. Springer	B38/379	12.62-ac. lot divided from above
10/14/1938	Fredrika N. Springer	Marian E. Pinder	A41/472	
10/14/1938	Marian E. Pinder	William Lobdell & Fredrika Nesbitt Springer	A41/471	
10/10/1987	William Lobdell Springer dies, leaving property to his only child, Margaret S. Denham (WR091662)			
6/9/1988	Margaret S. Denham	Richard C. Porter II & Elizabeth Porter	714/116	
1/7/1999	Richard C. Porter II & Elizabeth Porter	Stephen M. & Janine D. Marrone	2570/38	
1/8/1999	Richard C. Porter II & Elizabeth Porter	Stephen M. & Janine D. Marrone	2593/268	

Foxhill is significant on the local level under National Register Criterion A in the area of Community Planning and Development for its association with the American country house movement during the early twentieth century. Located within Delaware’s “Chateau Country,” the property was constructed by a wealthy and socially prominent couple, the Springers, who commissioned architect G. Morris Whiteside, II, to design the house. Foxhill is also significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a fine example of a Colonial Revival-style country house and as the work of G. Morris Whiteside, II, a notable Wilmington architect who had a prolific career in Delaware from 1910-1963. The property retains a high level of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The original block and wings are unaltered, and the later additions are small in scale and sympathetic in design. The property is not recommended eligible under Criterion B; although socially prominent, the Springers did not make historically significant contributions as defined by the National Register Criteria. It also lacks significance under Criterion D, as the dwelling’s construction methods are common and do not have potential as an important source of information. A National Register of Historic Places Determination of Eligibility Form for Foxhill is included in Appendix C.