United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic  Penn House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number  324 Maple Avenue  ___ not for publication

city, town  Reidsville  ___ vicinity of

state  North Carolina  037  ___ code  county  Rockingham  157  ___ code

3. Classification

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4. Owner of Property

name  City of Reidsville

street & number  P. O. Box 1437

city, town  Reidsville  ___ vicinity of  state  N. C.  27320

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.  Rockingham County Courthouse

street & number

city, town  Wentworth  state  N. C.

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Reidsville, North Carolina: An Inventory of Historic and Architectural Resources

by Laura A. W. Phillips  has this property been determined eligible?  ___ yes  ___ no

date  1981  ___ federal  ___ state  ___ county  ___ local

depository for survey records  Survey and Planning Branch, N.C. Division of Archives and History

city, town  Raleigh  state  N. C.
Set on a three-acre lot in a neighborhood of far more modest houses a few blocks south of downtown Reidsville, the Penn House complex comprises the two-and-a-half-story, brick Colonial Revival residence built in 1932 and nine outbuildings. Most of the latter were constructed during the 1910s and 1920s and designed to complement the original house on this site, an imposing residence with blond brick walls and a green tile roof erected about 1910 in a conservative version of the Prairie School idiom popular at that time.

The lot is a full block deep. The Maple Avenue frontage is lined with a low retaining wall of rusticated stone that calls attention to the impressive scale of the house and its grounds. The house is reached from Maple Avenue by a brick walk that bisects the broad front lawn and runs to the house's main entrance, and by a curved concrete driveway which begins near the north end of the Maple Avenue frontage and separates the house's main block from the one-and-a-half-story servants' quarters on the north (right) side of the residence. Tall stone portals topped by finials flank these entrances and hold gates of ornamental iron. A smaller, less impressive entrance to the property at the south side of the Maple Avenue frontage also remains but has fallen into disuse.

The house is a carefully executed version of the Colonial Revival style so popular during the 1920s and 1930s. It has four sections: the central, two-and-a-half-story main block; a one-story, L-shaped wing that directly adjoins the south (left) side of the main section; the previously mentioned one-story servants' quarters; and a one-story wing behind the main block containing the kitchen. The servants' wing extends over the driveway with broad segmental arches to join the house, providing sheltered entrance from the driveway to both the main block and the wing.

The main block, five bays wide and two bays deep, is laid up in one-to-five common bond (the brick has been painted white) and has a gable roof sheathed with slate. Dominating the house is a full-facade, full-height portico with six Corinthian columns. Partially engaged by a curve of the house's main roofline, the portico shelters a broad, tiled terrace that carries across the facade and also wraps around part of the main block's south side. The symmetrical five-bay facade has 8/8 sash windows with simple shutters and a carefully detailed fanlit central entrance enriched with leaded glass and paired colonnettes.

The side and rear elevations also have 8/8 sash windows, but without shutters. Two French doors flank the chimney on the south side of the main block, opening out from the living room onto the tiled terrace. Quarter-circular attic vents flank the chimneys at both gable ends, and two hip-roofed dormers pierce the rear slope of the roof.

The first floor of the main block, which follows a center hall plan, contains most of the house's notable interior trim—well-executed, conservative, Neo-Federal style woodwork. The house was erected in anticipation of the marriage of the Penns' daughter, Virginia, in 1932, and perhaps for this reason the broad center hall is the house's decorative focal point. The hall displays such freely interpreted Federal features as an arched portal separating the front reception area from the rear section containing...
the stair, doorways framed by reeded pilasters with sunburst panels and reeded over­
doors, chair rails, Greek key friezes, and molded cornices. The curving, single-run
stair has a delicate, Federal-inspired design featuring thin turned balusters, sawn
brackets on the open stringer, and a rounded handrail terminating in a volute over
the newel.

Two other first floor rooms are also well-detailed—the living room and the
library. The living room, the largest space on the first floor, has the same chair
rail, Greek key frieze, and molded cornice seen in the hall. Its most notable
feature is a handsome mantel with a typical three-part arrangement painted a dis­tinctive green hue with trim painted gold. The library is lined with dark wood
paneling punctuated by a baseboard, a chair rail, and a cornice with sawtooth trim.

The main block’s second floor has a surprisingly simple finish with no decorative
detail of note. The north rear room was remodeled into a large dressing and bathroom
about 1950; at the same time this space was enlarged by the construction of a flat­
roofed rear addition over the servants' quarters. This addition, of frame construction
sheathed with asbestos siding, is not visible from the front of the house. An enclosed
stair at the rear of the hall leads to the unpartitioned attic, which is said to have
been used as a ballroom.

The southern L-shaped wing has a gable roof and consists of four rooms along a
hall leading from the center hall of the main block. Its most notable interior
features are two Colonial Revival mantels with scroll-like pilasters, one of which
displays the distinctive green-and-gold color scheme of the living room mantel.

The servants' wing is three bays wide by two bays deep and has a hip roof. The
two northern (right) bays are set at an angle to the rest of the wing and project
slightly forward of it, giving the wing the appearance of a rambling cottage. The
façade bay closest to the main block has a three-sided, projecting bay window. The
interior, which contains two small bedrooms and a large living and dining area, has
two typical Colonial Revival mantels.

The forms and materials of several outbuildings on the Penn property reflect
those of the house that Charles Ashby Penn erected on the site about 1910. The largest
of these structures, and the one which best reflects the design of the original Penn
residence, is the two-story garage and servants' apartment (#2 on site plan), built
between 1914 and 1922. The blond brick structure has a hip roof and broad eaves like
those of the earlier house; the bands of windows at the second story with panels below
further echo the horizontal emphasis of the first Penn residence. The original tile
roof has been lost. At the rear of the building is a brick, gable-roofed doghouse.

Adjoining the garage and servants' apartment at the rear is a three-bay, one-
story, blond brick structure (#3) with a tile roof, also erected between 1914 and
1922. Each of the three bays originally contained a service area for the house:
the one nearest the house was a kitchen; the second was a pantry and canning room; the third, which is now open, served at one time as a doghouse. Adjoining this structure is the two-story blond brick dairy (#4), a nearly square building erected about the same time as the adjacent structures, which also retains its tile roof.

Three other outbuildings of light-colored brick also recall the design of the earlier house. The one-story smokehouse (#5) built before 1922, stands directly behind the house and has broad eaves and a tile pyramidal roof topped with a finial. A handsome slate-roofed gazebo (#6) with stone trim stands in the large south yard, as does the slightly later pump house (#7), erected between 1922 and 1929.5

Two other outbuildings of note are the large greenhouses which stand in the rear yard. The earlier and architecturally more distinctive of these (#8) adjoins the smokehouse. The shape of this greenhouse, which was erected before 1922,6 follows that of a Tudor arch. The second greenhouse (#9), erected at an undetermined date after 1929, is set perpendicular to and a short distance behind the first. Adjoining the second greenhouse is a one-story brick storage and work building (#10) that was probably built at the same time.

FOOTNOTES

1 Interview with W. Clark Turner, June 1982.


3 Sanborn Map, 1922.

4 Sanborn Map, 1922.

5 Sanborn Map, 1929.

6 Sanborn Map, 1922.
8. Significance

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Specific dates ca. 1910, 1932

Builder/Architect Bryant Hurd, Danville, Va. (architect)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Penn House, the largest and most elaborate Colonial Revival residence from the 1920-1940 period still standing in Reidsville, is the finest surviving house in Reidsville associated with the Penn family, which has played an important role in the city's economic and civic development for over a century. The house, a good example of Colonial Revival design, was erected in the early part of 1932 by Stella Edrington Penn (1883-1959) after a fire destroyed the house built for her husband, Charles Ashby Penn (1868-1931). Nine outbuildings remain on the property, most of which were designed to complement the original Penn house, a blond brick residence designed in a conservative Prairie-inspired idiom and built about 1910. The complex thus demonstrates changing architectural fashions during the 1910-1935 period. Charles Penn worked for his father's firm, the F. R. Penn Tobacco Company, until it was absorbed into the American Tobacco Company in 1911. He occupied a succession of key positions with American and was largely responsible for developing the firm's popular Lucky Strike brand of cigarettes. Penn was a large contributor to humanitarian, civic, and religious activities in Reidsville, and Stella Edrington Penn carried on her husband's philanthropy after his death. The Penns played major role in the founding and expansion of Annie Penn Hospital, Reidsville's principal medical facility, which was named for Charles Penn's mother. Mrs. Penn established the Ashby Penn Foundation Cancer Fund to care for indigent patients, was largely responsible for the founding of Reidsville's first library, and contributed heavily to several of the town's churches.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT:

A. Associated with the growth of Reidsville and of the tobacco industry in the North Carolina piedmont during the early twentieth century; associated with the growth of civic and humanitarian activities in North Carolina cities and towns as the result of economic growth during the early and middle twentieth century.

B. Associated with Charles Ashby Penn (1868-1931), an important figure in Reidsville's tobacco industry who was largely responsible for developing the popular Lucky Strike brand of cigarettes. Associated with Stella Edrington Penn (1883-1959) who continued and expanded her husband's philanthropic activities.

C. The Penn House is a locally notable example of the Colonial Revival style. Its most striking features are its two-story, full-facade Corinthian portico and its fine Neo-Federal style interior details. The house is set on a three-acre lot that is also occupied by a handsome and unusually extensive collection of brick outbuildings designed to complement the original residence on this site, a brick house designed in an interpretation of the Prairie style that was relatively rare in North Carolina. The complex thus represents two important architectural styles of the early twentieth century.
The Penn House is located in the Rockingham County town of Reidsville. It was built in the early part of 1932 by Mrs. Stella Edrington Penn to replace an earlier house which burned in November of 1931. The first house burned about one month after the death of Mrs. Penn's husband, prominent tobacco executive Charles Ashby Penn. The second house was built on the same lot as the first house and the lot contains a number of outbuildings associated with Charles Penn.1

Charles Penn was born in Patrick, Virginia in 1868, the first of eleven children of Frank and Annie Spencer Penn. The family moved to Reidsville in 1874 and became active in the town's thriving young tobacco industry. His father manufactured tobacco under the name F. R. Penn Tobacco Company. Charles Penn worked for his father's firm until it was absorbed into the American Tobacco Company in 1911. He became a director of the company in 1913 and moved his office to New York City, corporate headquarters of the firm. Penn was largely responsible for developing the "Lucky Strike" blend for the company. Lucky Strikes quickly became one of the country's leading cigarettes and in "May of 1917 ... Charles Penn contracted for construction of a factory in Reidsville, to make Luckies exclusively."2

In 1916 Penn became a vice-president of the company. He divided his time between the New York Office and the Reidsville plant. He became head of manufacturing and head of the leaf department in 1923.3 One observer wrote that "As a manufacturing man with a knack of maintaining consistent quality control and an uncanny knowledge of leaf, Charlie Penn was . . . unique."4 Penn took suddenly ill in New York in the fall of 1931 and died of gastro-intestinal toxemia on October 23. He was hailed as one of the giants in the tobacco industry. The New York Times wrote that "his modern attitude toward the cigarette industry . . . largely contributed to the success of the company,"5 while the Greensboro Daily News wrote that he was "a pioneer in the introduction of modern machine methods into cigarette and cigar manufacture."6

Penn's Reidsville home burned down in November of 1931 and his widow, Stella Edrington Penn had a new house built on the property by Danville, Virginia, architect Bryant Hurd. The house was completed in the early part of 1932. Mrs. Penn was born Stella Edrington in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1883. Her parents were Henry Clay Edrington and Virginia Clarke Edrington. Henry Clay Edrington was founder of the Farmers and Merchants bank in Fort Worth (later the First National Bank of Fort Worth) and had large holdings in land and in cattle. Stella attended Virginia's Hollins College. One of her schoolmates was Anita Penn, sister of Charles Penn, and while visiting the former she met Charles Penn, whom she married in 1906.7

In Reidsville Charles Penn "was a large contributor to philanthropic movements and maintained numerous private charities."8 Penn continued and expanded these charities after the death of her husband. Charles Penn contributed heavily towards the establishment of the Annie Penn Memorial Hospital (named after his mother) in Reidsville in 1920 and Mrs. Penn continued to contribute heavily for the hospital's expansion.9

Mrs. Penn's philanthropic contributions to Reidsville and Rockingham County were varied. She established the Ashby Penn Foundation Cancer Fund to provide care for indigent patients, and was instrumental in the creation of the Reidsville Junior League, which also focused much of its attention on the needs of indigent patients. She contributed heavily
to churches, including the First Baptist Church of Reidsville, the Penn Memorial Baptist Church, and the Church of Christ, and others. She was largely responsible for the establishment of Reidsville's first library and was cofounder of Reidsville's first garden club. She was active in a number of other community education, social, and civic organizations.

Stella Penn died in Reidsville in 1959. She and her husband had three children, Edrington, Virginia (Wettlaufer), and Frank. She left the house and property equally to all three children. Edrington Penn bought out his siblings' interests and lived in the house with his wife Bernice until his death in 1973. Edrington Penn also spent much of his life in the tobacco industry and was president of the Carolina-Virginia Tobacco Company. His widow remarried Rogers T. Moore and they lived in the Penn House until 1980 when she donated it to the City of Reidsville. Future plans for the house are uncertain but there are hopes that it can be used as a museum, library, or for other civic purposes. The city also owns the numerous outbuildings associated with Charles Penn, including dairy buildings, a gazebo, a garage, and several storage buildings.

The tobacco industry has been of critical importance in the development of Reidsville and no family has had more to do with this development than the Penn family. In addition to the economic contributions of the family the Penns have made significant contributions to the medical, educational, religious, civic, and social health of the town. The Penn House is the house most associated with this important family.

The Penn House complex is significant not only for its association with the Penn family, but because of its architectural character. The house itself is the largest and most elaborate Colonial Revival residence from the 1920-1940 period still standing in Reidsville. Designed by architect Bryant Hurd of Danville, Virginia, the house is a carefully executed version of the style featuring an impressive Corinthian portico and handsome interior woodwork with freely interpreted Neo-Federal details. Most of the property's nine outbuildings were designed to complement the original Penn residence erected about 1910, which was a notable example of the conservative Prairie-inspired idiom popular at that time. Considered as a whole, the complex illustrates the shift in architectural tastes from the Prairie idiom to historically derived designs during the late 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s.

The Prairie idiom was developed by Frank Lloyd Wright and other architects working in the Chicago area during the 1890-1920 period who sought to create an original architecture not inspired by historical styles. The idiom achieved its widest acceptance in the Midwest, particularly in Chicago and its suburbs, but houses inspired by the style were built in other regions of the country during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Inventories of historic architecture in the cities and towns of North Carolina's central piedmont have discovered very few examples of the idiom. There appear to be no surviving Prairie-inspired houses in either Reidsville or Winston-Salem. The most fully realized Prairie style design in the region is probably the Latham-Baker House in Greensboro, designed by local architect Wells L. Brewer and built in 1913. The design of the Latham-Baker House displays a pronounced horizontal emphasis, typical of the Prairie idiom, which is accentuated by the broad projecting eaves, the smooth granite
belt course between the first and second floors, and the elongated granite window boxes. Another Greensboro house whose design reflects Prairie influence is the A. M. Scales residence, which has exceptionally broad eaves and a nearly flat-roofed, strongly horizontal front porch. The Scales House also exhibits elements of the American Four-square and the bungalow, and thus, like the original Penn House, represents a conservative interpretation of the Prairie idiom. The Scales House resembles, as did the original Penn House, less daring examples of the Prairie idiom designed by such Chicago architects as Eben E. Roberts and George W. Maher.

Although the Prairie idiom enjoys much esteem today, it did not obtain the broad acceptance that historically-derived styles gained to an increasing extent during the second decade of the twentieth century. Architects found it difficult to find clients interested in their plans, and some began designing in the historical styles. In North Carolina this trend was reflected in the disappearance of Prairie-inspired elements from residential designs in the 1920s. Revivals of various historical styles—Italian Renaissance, Spanish, and especially the American Colonial, came to dominate domestic architectural fashion during the decade, and early American idioms have prevailed in North Carolina and the rest of the country ever since. It was therefore not surprising that Stella Edrington Penn chose the Colonial Revival style when she had the family residence rebuilt in late 1931 and early 1932.
1. The first Penn House was built around 1909 or 1910 on land purchased by Penn from Mrs. M. C. Wootton. Penn paid one dollar for just over three acres. Rockingham County Deed Book 158, p. 468. In 1917 Penn purchased an adjacent lot from Ira Humphreys for $3,300. Rockingham County Deed Book 190, p. 235.


4. Sold American, 46.


9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

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Quadrangle name Reidsville
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Quadrangle scale 1:24000

Verbal boundary description and justification
The nominated property includes the house, outbuildings, and the three-acre lot on which the house sits. See attached plat map.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

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11. Form Prepared By

Significance by Jim Sumner, Researcher, and Peter R. Kaplan, Preservation Planner, N.C. Division of Archives and History; Description by Peter R. Kaplan

organization N.C. Division of Archives and History date September 1, 1983

street & number 109 East Jones Street telephone 919/733-6545

city or town Raleigh state North Carolina

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state ___ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

For NPS use only

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

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

Chief of Registration


