

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic NONE

and/or common GWYNEDD HALL

2. Location

street & number 1244 Meetinghouse Road N/A not for publication

city, town Lower Gwynedd Township N/A vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 42 county Montgomery code 091

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	N/A being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mr & Mrs. Nicholas B. Wainwright

street & number 1244 Meetinghouse Road

city, town Gwynedd N/A vicinity of state Pennsylvania

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montgomery County Court House

street & number

city, town Norristown state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? N/A N/A yes no

date N/A federal N/A state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one		
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date	<u>N/A</u> <u>1852</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed				

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Gwynedd Hall, located on Meetinghouse Road in Lower Gwynedd Township, is a Greek Revival country residence built in the style of the most sophisticated Revival structures found in Philadelphia and the surrounding residential areas. It was originally constructed as a substantial farm house by Warder Cresson in 1824. The building was transformed into its present configuration in 1852.

Gwynedd Hall was originally a three-story redstone residence, finished with a painted pebble dash finish. In 1852, the building was redesigned to its present configuration. As part of this alteration, a two-story front addition was constructed of stone with a smooth stucco finish on the first floor and wood clapboard on the upper floors. This section with its high ceilings, conceals the original three-story building behind it. A handsome pedimented portico is centered on the building's facade. The cornice and entablature are constructed of wood and are unadorned. The portico provides protection to an open veranda. The main face is symmetrically ordered, speaking to one of the major principles of this style. A large entrance is flanked by two windows on each side. The doors are set into a surround with multi-light transom and side lights and are constructed of wood with paneling. Large floor to ceiling windows, double hung with nine over nine lights, bring light into the first floor parlor and dining room. Molded panel shutters and molded hoods complete the detailing of the ground floor sash. The sash on the upper floors are smaller, double hung, nine over nine sash with louvered shutters. Crowning the front facade is a plain molded wood cornice with plain fascia board. Chimneys flank each of the building ends. The slope of the hipped roof prohibited the installation of dormer windows, as was typical in Greek Revival styling.

Open porches with extensive decorative wrought iron railings, ballusters and cornices grace each side of the building, and part of its front and back, as well. This decorative iron work is one of the building's most interesting aspects and constitutes an excellent example of Philadelphia made (1852) iron work. These additions were also undertaken in 1852, giving the building a southern flavor.

The side elevation shows double hung, six over nine sash with paneled shutters on the ground floor. The upper floors have double hung, two over two sash with segmented heads. Segmentally arched wood hoods and louvered shutters detail this facade.

The rear of the building repeats the pediment motif with a pedimented gable roof line with broken returns. Double hung, six over nine sash, with louvered shutters are on the upper floors. A small addition was made to the building, constructed of stone with a stucco finish, also with a pedimented gable return. The original farm structure was "L" shaped with a return section enveloped by the later two story addition. Double hung sash, with louvered shutters with simple wood heads, rest in symmetrical placement of three openings on each floor. The wrought iron porch wraps around to this end of the building.

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The house is set back from the road and is approached by a circular drive. Near the main house are various out buildings, including a small smoke house with a shake-shingled, hipped roof. A stone ice house has a hipped roof and a pedimented dormer window with double hung, six over six sash. A stucco wood shed is attached to the ice house. A nearby carriage house is constructed of redstone with a pebble dash finish. It has scalloped wood barge board trim with large barn doors. All these buildings were put up in 1824 and most bear the date stones.

The property remains an intact example of a nineteenth century rural estate. Moreover, the subsequent changes chronical the evolution of this estate from rural farm to country residence.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1824; alt. 1852 **Builder/Architect** Warder Cresson, owner

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Gwynedd Hall is located along Meetinghouse Road in Lower Gwynedd Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. It represents an interesting combination of history and architecture.

First established as a working farmstead, Gwynedd Hall evolved into a gentleman's country estate. This trend paralleled growth and development in Lower Gwynedd Township throughout the nineteenth century. Gwynedd Hall is an architecturally important example of country Greek Revival architecture.

The history of Gwynedd Hall has been set forth by one of its owners, Nicholas B. Wainwright, former Director of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, in his article "Gwynedd Hall". This article was published in the Fall 1957 issue of the Bulletin of the Historical Society of Montgomery County.

Gwynedd Hall is an excellent example of the mid-nineteenth century period of design. It is an impressive country residence, rich in detailing. The building's design marked the progression of Gwynedd from rural farm land to an enclave of elegant country estates owned by men of wealth seeking an escape from the hectic pace of the city. At the time of its construction, the appearance of a Greek Revival temple must have received great attention in an area which was previously populated by substantial, yet understated, stone farm buildings. The greater portion of the original estate was sold in the early part of the twentieth century, however, the core of the estate, on several acres of prime residential land, remains completely intact. The buildings include the main house, the ice house, the smoke house and the carriage house, in a beautiful setting of mature trees and plantings. The interior of Gwynedd Hall retains the detailing and character of its 1852 alteration, and presents itself as an elegant country estate home to this day.

The grounds encompassing Gwynedd Hall are part of an original purchase of 7,820 acres of land from William Penn in 1697, which would become Gwynedd Township. The original settlers were members of the Society of Friends from North Wales. By the end of 1698, this newly established Welsh community had sixty-six residents. Among the more prominent settlers was Cadwallader Evans, who purchased a tract of land containing 609 acres and created a prosperous farm spanning Meetinghouse Road. Eventually, Gwynedd Hall was to be built on Meetinghouse Road on a parcel of those original farm lands.

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The Evans farm passed down through the family until it was sold in 1812 by another Calwallader Evans, the great grandson of the first settler. The land was purchased as an investment by Charles W. Hare, who sold his interest in 1817 to the Gwynedd Land Company. The land syndicate parceled the Evans' property into smaller tracts and sold them at auction in December, 1823. Warder Cresson purchased the largest tract of 49 acres for \$1,934.51, and, in 1824, he constructed a large three story redstone house which was to become Gwynedd Hall.

Warder Cresson was a wealthy farmer who was born in Philadelphia. He was also a member of the Society of Friends. He moved his family from Byberry to Gwynedd in 1824, attracted by the excellent farming and the Gwynedd Meeting of the Society of Friends. In addition to building the house, Cresson built a large barn and a carriage house, in keeping with the elegant style of his new house. As might be found in a farming operation, there was also a springhouse, smoke-house and several wells with pumps for providing water. Cresson had all his buildings clad in a pebble dash finish which was then painted. The carriage house retains the original painted, pebble dash finish to the present time. This detail must have handsomely set apart these buildings from the usual, unadorned finish of the local redstone, giving them a rich and sophisticated appearance.

Cresson continued to make major improvements to his property. In 1825, he purchased ten additional acres. His farmstead, now totaling 59 acres, was all enclosed by fencing. There were ten acres of woodland. Fruit orchards were planted. The fields were plowed and planted. During this period, the community of Gwynedd continued to grow and prosper as more houses were built and farmsteads established within a radius of the Gwynedd Meeting House of the Society of Friends. In 1833, Cresson left Gwynedd, as a result of his radical religious beliefs.

The property changed hands twice after Cresson left, to a Dr. William Gibson and then to Edward Shippen Burd, a noted Philadelphian. Burd died in 1848 and never occupied the farmstead. His estate sold the property to Miers Busch in 1852.

Miers Busch was a retired businessman who embraced the country life and moved his family to Cresson's handsome estate. In 1852, Busch commissioned the alteration and renovation of the redstone residence into an elegant Greek Revival mansion.

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Miers Busch was attracted by the high architectural style of Greek Revival. The Greek Revival style had achieved popularity during a period lasting from 1820 to 1860. Revival design was on the wane in the more urban areas in 1852. In this country community of Gwynedd, however, the construction of this impressive "temple" must have created quite a stir. At the direction of Miers Busch, the main house was dramatically transformed with the addition of an enormous projecting portico supported by four smooth dressed, Doric Order columns.

The front addition was two stories in height. A rear addition rose three stories in height and repeated the Greek temple motif in a pedimented roof line at the gable end. The side and rear elevations were graced with covered porches with decorative wrought iron railings, ballusters and cornices. The Greek Revival theme was continued into the interior of the house with large rooms and the stylistically typical high ceilings. These alterations were combined with the lower ceiling rooms of the earlier house, creating an amalgam of styles. The house was used as a year round residence and its owner actively pursued the life of a gentleman farmer. The enhancement of the landscape was also addressed with the planting of a variety of trees, bushes and shrubs.

The stress of undertaking these alterations seems to have taken its toll on the Busch family. In 1859, Mr. Busch offered the property for sale. The estate was advertised for sale in several major Philadelphia newspapers. It was called "Mayfield" in the ads. The house was now a seventeen room mansion, and the property was described as an "elegant country seat". The area had developed into a wealthy farming community. The opening of the railroad from Philadelphia to Gwynedd Valley and the opening of public roads, made this community easily accessible from the city, creating a high profile for this country enclave.

The property was purchased by John Gilbert, a chemist and manufacturer of patent medicines and drugs. In 1860, the house was renamed Gwynedd Hall and was now used as a summer residence. John Gilbert purchased an additional nineteen acres and a tenant farmer continued to run the property as a working farm. Gilbert brought indoor plumbing to the building. The water was drawn into the house pumps driven by a windmill set up in the back yard. Several other out buildings were constructed, including an icehouse, a small cooling house and servant's quarters. In 1872, Gilbert brought Joseph Hopkins and his family from England to tend the gardens and landscape. Under Hopkins direction, additional greenhouses were constructed and the ground meticulously maintained.

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After John Gilbert's death, the family used the property for two more seasons before renting out the property and grounds. Over the next ten years, the property would be leased to a series of families. It remained an active crop farm until the tenant farmer's death in 1889, afterwards the livestock continued to help sustain the estate. Joseph Hopkins continued to keep the grounds in impeccable condition. It held distinction as a showplace. John Gilbert's son Samuel H. Gilbert, the surviving trustee, came regularly to inspect the property. Samuel H. Gilbert died on March 20, 1896, and the house was not rented that year. By this time, Joseph Hopkins had moved his family to the neighboring borough of North Wales. Gwynedd Hall entered a dismal period of its history.

The family members sold off the contents of the property and it remained vacant, with the exception of a short period of time when the property was used for farming. By the turn of the century, the property had fallen into a serious state of neglect. The large barn burned after it was struck by lightning and the grounds were vandalized. This protracted period of decline ended in 1919 when Mr. & Mrs. Irvin King purchased the property. The main house and grounds were once again restored and all modern conveniences were installed. The Kings held the property for just two years, and then subdivided the land in 1921.

In 1921, Gwynedd Hall and fourteen surrounding acres were sold. This division did not alter the context or overall appearance of the estate, since the main building, the major outbuildings and the landscaped areas remained intact.

Two years after Irvin King had disposed of Gwynedd Hall, it was back in his hands, by virtue of a sheriff's sale, the purchasers not having complied with the terms of their mortgage. A new purchaser was soon found, and, in May 1924, the property was acquired by L. Albert Gray.

Ten years later, on January 2, 1934, Mrs. Clement R. Wainwright of Chestnut Hill bought the property. The Wainwright family has occupied Gwynedd Hall since 1934. Mr. & Mrs. Nicholas B. Wainwright are the present occupants of Gwynedd Hall. The main house, the carriage house, the smokehouse and the icehouse that has been enlarged into a garage, still cluster on eight and one-half acres of the original Warder Cresson homestead established in 1824.

Gwynedd Hall presents substantially the same appearance that it did over century ago, after Miers Busch renovations in 1852. The building represents an interesting, largely intact example of country Greek Revival architecture in America. America adopted Grecian architectural principals into the common vocabulary of domestic and institutional design. The retro-fitting of an older house with Grecian motifs became a popular trend as overscale pedimented porticos could easily be applied to the surfaces of a Colonial or Federal style townhouse or farmhouse. Gwynedd Hall continues to bear stately witness to the charm of a bygone day, in this tradition.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Nicholas B. Wainwright, "Gwynedd Hall". Bulletin of the Historical Society Montgomery County, Pennsylvania (Norristown, PA), Fall, 1957.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 8.5 acres

Quadrangle name Ambler

Quadrangle scale 1" = ,000'

UTM References

A

1	8	4	7	9	0	1	0	1	0	4	4	5	0	2	1	0
Zone		Easting						Northing								

B

1	8	4	7	9	2	4	0	4	4	5	0	2	1	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

C

1	8	4	7	9	2	4	0	4	4	5	0	0	6	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

D

1	8	4	7	9	0	2	0	4	4	5	0	0	4	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

E

Zone		Easting						Northing						

F

Zone		Easting						Northing						

G

Zone		Easting						Northing						

H

Zone		Easting						Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification Refer to Montgomery County Deed Book #1369, page 194; Volume 1809, page 349.

The 8.5 acres contains all of the original buildings and the grounds surrounding original buildings, from the time of Warder Cresson's original construction in 1824.

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Nicholas B. Wainwright/owner

organization N/A

date May 10, 1985

street & number 1244 Meetinghouse Rd., P.O. Box 312 telephone "215" 646-4375

city or town Gwynedd, PA 19436-0031

state Pennsylvania

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

Larry E. Tise
title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 8/2/85

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

Attachment: National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form for "Gwynedd Hall"

U.S.G.S. Map, Ambler Quadrangle, highlighting "Gwynedd Hall".

