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THE SELLING OF WOODSIDE PARK

by Robert E. Oshel

A major problem faced the investors in the Woodside Development Corporation in November of 1922: how to sell building lots in "Woodside Park," their new "home colony," as they described it. The problem was far from simple and their marketing strategies some 70 years ago, as well as the development of the subdivision itself, tell much about people of that era.

Charles W. Hopkins, M. K. Armstrong and other investors had purchased the 184-acre Alton Farm from the heirs of Evening Star owner Crosby S. Noyes for \$160,000 (\$1.5 million in today's dollars); the \$120,000 balance was to be paid to the Noyes heirs within five years.¹ In addition, they faced considerable expenses in making their new acquisition ready for sale. Streets had to be built and forest areas partially cleared. Existing structures on the farm had to be removed or made salable, including not only the Noyes family mansion, but a substantial barn, a carriage house and stable, a bowling alley building, a corn house, two hen houses, a boy's carpenter shop, pump house, a 100-foot tall water tower, four houses which had been occupied by farm workers, and some sheds.²

The Woodside Development Corporation worked on the problem of selling. In real estate development, location is of prime importance. Today Woodside Park would be considered very close-in and convenient, just north of what is now downtown Silver Spring, between Colesville Road and Georgia Avenue, and between Dale Drive and Spring Street, but in the early 1920s it was on the far fringes of suburban development. An early suburban development in Silver Spring called "Woodside" had been successful but only because it hugged the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad line, with its frequent commuter service and reasonable fares. Other early suburbs such as Kensington were successful for the same reason, yet even large parts of upper Northwest Washington had not been developed for commuters, nor had any area in Silver Spring farther from the railroad line.

Alton Farm, across Georgia Avenue from the early "Woodside," was not close to the railroad. By the early 1920s, however, the increasing

popularity of the automobile began to make possible suburban development away from railroad lines. The Woodside Development Corporation, realizing this, capitalized on it and was one of the first in the area to do so.

The target market for Woodside Park's one-acre home sites was the upper middle class of Washington, D.C., whose members, although they did have to work for a living, were affluent enough to afford a car and could leave the crowded city behind, build a home on one of Woodside Park's acre plots and still commute to their jobs by automobile in a reasonable time. Roads had improved. Prestigious 16th Street had been constructed as far north as Alaska Avenue. Alaska Avenue connected it to Georgia Avenue, which in 1923 was improved with two-foot concrete shoulders, making it much more convenient for cars to pass each other, particularly in bad weather. In Maryland in 1913, the state had purchased Brookville Pike, as Georgia Avenue was called then, and removed the toll gates.

The automobile made it feasible for Alton Farm to be successfully developed into Woodside Park, but the developers still had to convince people that they should leave the city, bypass the large areas of Northwest Washington that were just being developed residentially or were still undeveloped, and move all the way out to Maryland. They did this by promoting Woodside Park as a unique environment for construction of well designed, attractive homes, and by emphasizing both residential architecture and landscape architecture in marketing the neighborhood.

A few days before it had completed the purchase of Alton Farm on November 14, 1922, the Woodside Development Corporation and Hopkins-Armstrong, Inc., the real estate firm of its principals, began a publicity campaign which capitalized on two major points. The first was the public's interest in the homes and gardens of the rich and famous, in this case Crosby S. Noyes; the second, the desire of people to live in well-designed homes in a well-designed landscape.

These themes were evident in the development's initial publicity. The first public mention of Woodside Park came in the Washington Herald of November 11, 1922, which printed a picture of the Noyes Mansion with the caption "This beautiful estate, known to all Washington as one of the most elaborate homes in the city, is located in the new subdivision called Woodside Park, which is rapidly being turned into an exclusive home colony by the Hopkins Land Company." The next day the Washington Post reported:

"The entire estate, with the exception of the home-place [Noyes mansion] will be sub-divided into a residential park of acre plots facing winding drives which follow the contours of the land ... so as to conserve the natural beauty spots and landscape features of the estate. One of the features of the plan will be the development of a picturesque park which will entirely cross the farm and through which will wind a stream providing an abundant supply of sparkling water for a community swimming pool which will be constructed ... Rustic bridges will be thrown over this stream and winding walkways, shrubbery and flowers will combine to make this recreation park one of the charming spots in this 185 acre residential park ... These plots will be sold, protected by proper building restrictions, such as segregation of the business section, cost of homes, building

lines, etc., so as to insure the proper upbuilding of the section ... Large sites will be offered for sale on monthly terms, making it possible for persons of moderate means who desire to live in the suburbs with sufficient ground around them to have a garden, chickens, and fruit."

The Woodside Development Corporation also ran large ads in the Washington Post the same day and in the Evening Star on the 18th. The ad in the Post on the 19th emphasized that the Noyes Estate was "recognized as one of the Capital's showplaces" and that "One of the attractions of the development will be the laying out of a parkway which will wind through the property for nearly a mile and which will be featured by a community swimming pool, rippling cascades, trees, shrubbery, etc. ... Woodside Park is located in direct line of the most intensive building activity in Washington. It is approached by 16th St., Washington's finest boulevard, and is only 20 minutes' drive to the White House."

Later press coverage also emphasized that the landscaped beauty of Alton Farm was to be preserved as Woodside Park was developed. On November 25 the Washington Times and Washington Herald each ran a large picture of the landscaped grounds of the Alton Farm, the Times describing social events that had taken place on the farm the previous summer and fall, including the 5000 Shriners "who made merry" at their annual ox roast and picnic. A large ad the same day in the Star repeated the emphasis on natural beauty and wonderful planting and noted that prices for the lots in Woodside Park ranged from 3½ to 10 cents per square foot, in other words from \$1525 to \$4356 for an acre.



Crosby Noyes Mansion at Alton Farm

Large ads in all four papers a week later again capitalized on public interest in the Noyes mansion, with a picture of the mansion and grounds and a promise of afternoon tea for Sunday visitors to the mansion, which "no matter how cold outside, inside will be warm and cozy." It was also mentioned that Woodside Park had city conveniences such as electric lights and water, but "is just far enough away from the rush of the city to enjoy the hush of the country."³

Promotion using the same themes continued on a lesser scale in early 1923. In addition, the developers wanted to project an image of bustling sales for their new development. Charles Hopkins apparently knew how to get the favorable newspaper publicity he wanted. On January 6, 1923, the Washington Times and the Washington Herald ran identical stories under the headlines "Records Smashed at Woodside Park" and "Woodside Park Closes Big Year."

"A city wide movement to migrate to the outlying section of Washington has constituted the most important trend in the local real estate field during the year just closed according to the Hopkins-Armstrong Corp., developer of Woodside Park, the Capital's most successful home colony project ...

"All records for the sales of home sites were broken when the announcement of the Woodside Park development was brought before the public several months ago. Discriminative buyers virtually flocked to the park with the hope of purchasing home sites. Now comes the statement that approximately \$20,000 worth of sites have been passed into the hands of home buyers ...

"That the development has proven a noteworthy success is evidenced by the sentiment expressed by the residents now residing at Woodside. A community of spirited citizens has sprung up in that section ..."

Actually, only three lots representing total sales of \$7444 had gone to settlement by January 6, but contracts for some of the four lots that went to settlement on February 1 may also have been signed by this time and been included in the \$20,000 total. In any event, no new homes had been constructed, and no "community of spirited citizens" had yet sprung up, unless Mr. Hopkins was referring to his own family, which was living in a Woodside Park home that predated the establishment of the subdivision.⁴

As spring approached, the developers redoubled their efforts to interest the public in the Noyes mansion, the landscaped grounds of Alton Farm, and for the first time, the architecture of homes to be built in Woodside Park. They established a series of weekly lectures in the Noyes mansion. In late February the "Woodside Park (Noyes Estate) Educational Course" was announced in a news story in the Washington Times and in a large ad in the Washington Post. The Times story noted that the lecture series was what the Hopkins Land Company termed "the first move toward co-operative home planning."⁵ The ad in the Post expanded on this theme:

"As a stimulus to the highest possible development of the acre plots of Woodside Park, and in order that home builders may have the benefit of the best thought on the various branches of home building,

we have arranged for a series of illustrated lectures by men of national reputation in their particular lines of study, to take place in the living room of the Noyes Mansion at Woodside Park"

The lecture series was a stroke of marketing genius; Washington had never seen anything like it and Woodside Park received considerable free publicity from the lectures. On March 3, 1923, the Times and the Herald ran identical articles on the lecture series and on the first lecture by Stephen Child, "noted city planner," to be held on "The Importance of Landscape Architecture in Planning the Home." The Times article and later articles and ads stated that Hopkins-Armstrong would provide a car to take people interested in attending the lectures from the trolley stop at what is now Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road to the Noyes mansion.

The Evening Star on March 10, 1923, reported on Stephen Child's lecture and stated that 200 people were expected to attend the lecture by Robert F. Beresford, designer of hundreds of colonial-style homes in the Washington area, which was scheduled for the next afternoon. That same day the Times and the Herald ran stories about Beresford's lecture, Child's lecture and the rest of the lecture series. The following day, the Post featured the lectures on the front page of its real estate section, said that several hundred people had attended the lecture the previous Sunday, and that: "Hopkins-Armstrong, Inc. considers these lectures to constitute the most effective method of producing a harmonious and beautiful subdivision. Of the many Washington residents who have purchased acre plots at Woodside Park, the majority plan to erect homes early this spring."

All four papers had stories about Beresford's colonial architecture lecture, and later there were news stories about other lectures in the series. The next lecture was again by Stephen Child, this one on "Planting and Garden Design for the Suburban Home," followed the next week by Miss Blanch Corwin, "an authority on home economics," who spoke on "The Kitchen - Workshop of the Home." The Post, the Times and the Herald all reported extensively on her recommendations for kitchen design, including the importance of having drain boards on each side of the sink. Miss Corwin used lantern slides to illustrate a poorly arranged kitchen compared to a well planned one and "the advantages of a clean, level floor in the kitchen." The last lecture took place a week later, "Poultry Raising on a Suburban Plot," given by Alfred R. Lee. ⁶

Hopkins-Armstrong stepped up their paid advertising campaign in March to take advantage of the free publicity from the lectures and continued the campaign in April, May and June. The ads stated prices to be from 5 cents to 10 cents per square foot and emphasized the extensive improvements that were under way. Two crews were at work building five miles of paved streets and "beautiful entrances," designed by Robert F. Beresford, were to be erected on Brookeville Pike at Highland Drive and Noyes Drive with colonial-style small stone shelters for people waiting for the trolley.

Exceptional architecture was a hallmark of the development of Woodside Park. In June 1924 the first completed house ever offered for sale in Woodside Park was advertised. Hopkins-Armstrong offered the house at 9111 Woodland Drive for \$10,500, the equivalent of about \$96,500 in today's dollars, if the buyer would accept it on only a quarter-acre plot, or it



First House Offered for Sale in Woodside Park (Ad of June 8, 1924)

could be sold with a full acre. The home had been built with plans which won first prize at "Better Homes Week" expositions in both New York and Chicago, and had a center hall plan, with three bedrooms and one bath on the second floor. The ads for this house were also used to boost Woodside Park in general, noting "the beautiful park plan" and that half-acre plots were available from 8 cents to 12 cents per square foot.⁷

In late spring 1925 Hopkins-Armstrong began a series of ads promoting the beauty of the area and the fact that quarter-acre, half-acre and full-acre lots were available from \$1000 up. There was "a remarkably wide choice of lots of character, treed or sunny open slope, flat or rolling. All of nature's most attractive charms have been preserved. Boulders, rivulets and towering oaks. Many beautiful homes owned by friendly neighbors. Streets paved, water and electricity installed." Potential buyers were advised to "consult our architectural and building department added to our service."⁸

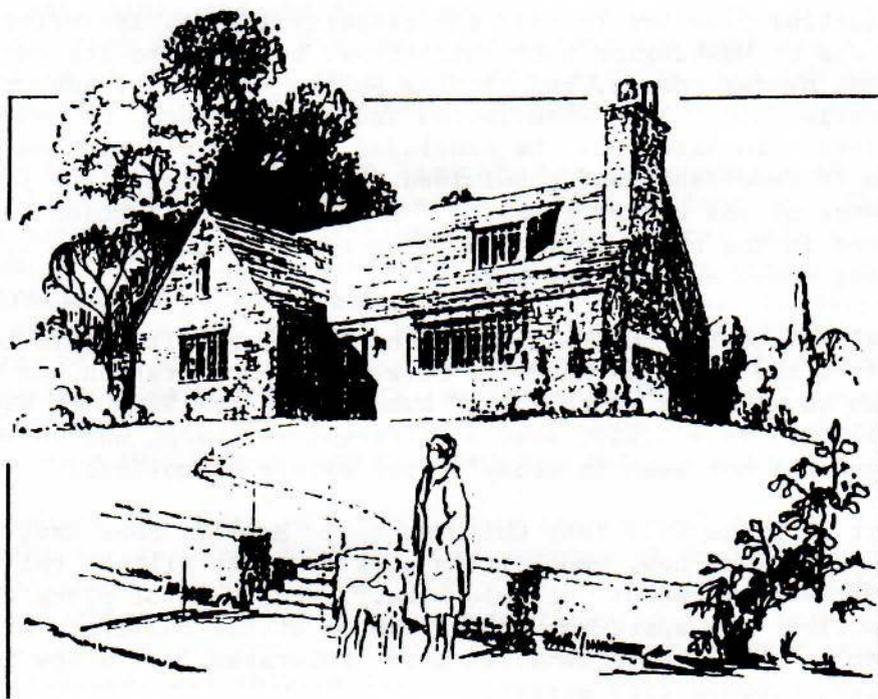
Hopkins-Armstrong in 1925 turned to Jules Henri de Sibour, notable local architect, to design houses for Woodside Park. He was one of Washington's most prominent architects and among other major projects, he designed the McCormick Apartments on Massachusetts Avenue, now the home of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and several magnificent homes which later became embassies.⁹

De Sibour's Woodside Park homes were much more modest. Beginning in the spring of 1926 his "Trails End," a two-story, brick dwelling with a slate roof, six rooms and a glassed-in sleeping porch at 1524 Grace Church

Road (then part of Dale Drive), was offered for \$14,500. There were other de Sibour homes on Grace Church Road, one advertised as "The Dale" and another as "Twin Gables Cottage." Also offered at this time and probably designed by de Sibour was "The Fireside" at 1310 Noyes Drive. Priced at \$14,850, it had six very large sunny rooms, a massive stone chimney and fireplace, and a cool, protected porch for summer, the cool porch an important selling point in those days before air conditioning.¹⁰

The idea of using prominent architects to attract lot buyers who would build well designed homes, which would then attract even more lot buyers, apparently worked. The architectural firm of Rodier & Kundzen designed the home at 1211 Woodside Parkway built in 1926 for J. Reginald Boyd. It is a stucco, Cotswold Cottage style home with nine-foot ceilings, chestnut woodwork and wrought ironwork on the staircase. The first floor contains a foyer, living room with fireplace, dining room, kitchen and bath; the second has three bedrooms and two baths. There is a recreation room in the basement and French doors open from the living room to the enclosed terrace with a formal fish pond between the house and the garage. Ads appearing in 1929 used this home as an example of the type of homes built in Woodside Park.¹¹

On the weekend of March 26-27, 1927, both the Evening Star and the Washington Post ran long illustrated articles on the completion of Philander D. Poston's "Stonecroft" at 1202 Woodside Parkway, another home designed by Rodier & Kundzen. Although "Stonecroft" was not for sale, it was open for public inspection on Saturday, March 26th and Sunday, April 3rd. The article on page 1 of the real estate section of the Star featured a photo as



"Stonecroft" at 1201 Woodside Parkway (Ad of June 13, 1926)

well as the floor plan for the house, and described the interior of the house in detail. The Post waxed eloquent about the house and neighborhood:

"Hugging the crest of a long, graceful hill, which fades gently into two little winding brooks lined with large boulders and graceful old trees, and overlooking three beautiful valleys, is a home of unusual distinction and simple beauty, quite unlike anything around Washington ...

"The splendid work of the fine arts commission, the Federal planning commission and other bodies looking to the preservation of the few remaining beauty spots of suburban Washington is being exemplified in the development of Woodside Park, a 200-acre tract, upon which large sums were spent for many years by the late Crosby Noyes in enhancing its natural beauty. The demand of these Federal commissions for the building of really artistic homes on large tracts is being happily met here."

With the coming of the Depression, sales activity in Woodside Park slowed. In 1933 the Hopkins-Armstrong firm dissolved and the Thomas E. Jarrell Company became the sales agent for the Woodside Development Corporation.¹² Thomas E. Jarrell, who ran a real estate agency and an insurance brokerage and was also president of the Washington Savings Bank, had been involved in the development of Woodside Park in one way or another even before the beginning of the project when he had taken an option to purchase "Alton Farm." He transferred the option to the Woodside Development Corporation, then in mid-1923 purchased from it the old Noyes mansion and the surrounding 10½ acres, an area bounded by what is now Colesville Road, North Noyes Drive, Fairview Road, and Woodside Parkway.

His initial plan was to sell the property intact, including the mansion, to one of Washington's organizations, but despite its earlier use for barbecues, oyster roasts, and picnics by the Board of Trade, the City Club, the Acacia Mutual Life Association and other groups, he was unable to find a buyer. In late 1924, he concluded that the old mansion was not salable, had it demolished and subdivided the acreage into lots for "suburban homes of the better class."¹³ After a name selection contest which resulted in the new subdivision being named "Wynnewood Park," Jarrell began building homes and selling lots.¹⁴

Jarrell of course capitalized on the beauty of Alton Farm to lure buyers out from the city, as Woodside Development Corporation had been doing, but an ad in 1925, which listed home sites from \$2200 to \$4400 and homes from \$12,750 to \$14,250, used a different approach, one in keeping with the times but not seen in today's real estate promotions:

"What Sort of Place Will Your Children call 'Home'? Some day, not so many years from now, your little boys or girls will be telling their little folks about 'our old home.' What sort of place will they describe - an apartment house like an office building, with a cold marble lobby, where children were 'tolerated,' or a row house on a noisy, crowded city street?

"Or will they have tales to tell of a home out where the blue begins - and the green of Springtime and the gold and red of Autumn? A home, centering around a real hearthstone where marshmallows were toasted on long Winter evenings and stockings were hung at the Yuletide? ... will you buy or build your suburban home now or after it is too late for your children to get the full benefit of its health and joy-giving advantages? Come out to Wynnewood Park ..." ¹⁵

Throughout the development and selling of Wynnewood Park, which lasted into 1938, Jarrell's ads and the articles appearing in newspapers emphasized the fine landscape architecture of Alton Farm and how it had been preserved in the subdivision. The story "Nature Is Retained in Wynnewood Park," in the Post of April 21, 1929, is typical:

"A suburban development, in which man and nature worked together in the production of a residential park, is to be found in Wynnewood Park, the Thomas E. Jarrell Co. project on the Colesville Pike ... No steam shovel was employed in the construction work to level off the natural beauties of knoll and dale. No straight lines were used to lay off streets ... Instead every curve that nature placed in the contour of the land to lend softness and beauty to the surroundings was preserved ... As nearly as possible, nothing that was on the old estate, with the exception of the buildings, has been disturbed ...

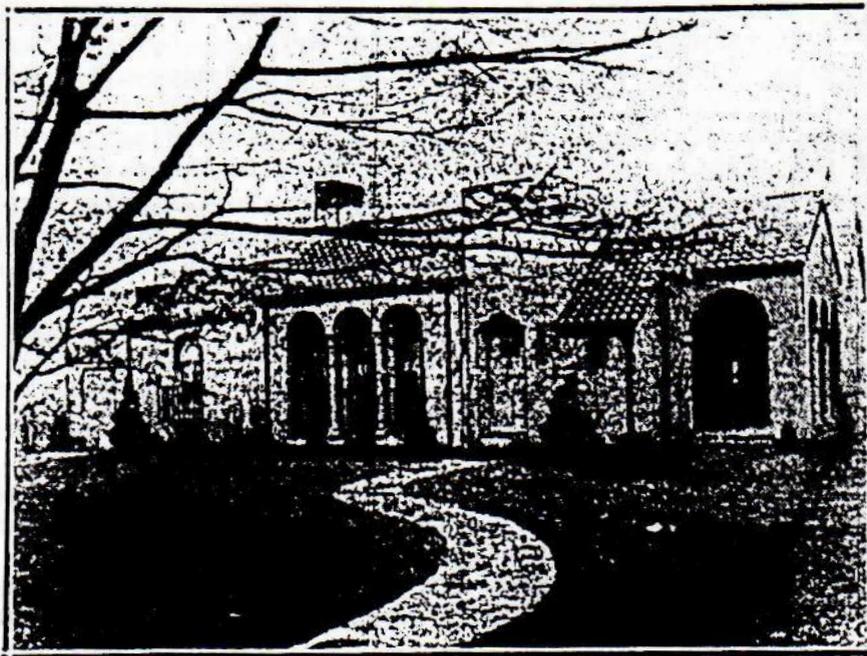
"The trees of Wynnewood Park, gathered with painstaking care from many parts of the world by the former owners, have all been preserved. On the 10 acres of this heart of the old Noyes estate are to be found cherry blossom trees from the Orient, walnuts from England, locusts from Jerusalem, dogwoods, magnolias of many types, firs, cedars, pine, red and branch maples, elms, apples, cherries, poplars and many others. Scattered throughout the park are scores of varieties of shrubbery, such as althea, syringa, Spanish bayonet, lilac, weigelia, forsythia, spirea, hydrangea and many other kinds.

"Into this setting, developed to beautify the surroundings of the mansion of the estate, the new homes have been insinuated. They have not been thrust into the picture ... The general effect of spaciousness and the atmosphere of a park is further preserved by the entire lack of barriers between the various lots. No hedges rise to stand as a bar, however beautiful, between neighbors. No fences are to be found ... Incidentally, the soil of Wynnewood Park, developed through the years, presents to the flower lover a medium for the production of the blooms in which he takes delight. A foot or more of friable loam composes the surface soil ...

"The atmosphere of a park of homes rather than a real estate development is preserved by the entire absence of duplication in the designs of houses constructed. Dutch colonial, English colonial, Spanish and other types are represented. The materials are varied as the designs, including stone, stucco, tinted stucco, brick, clapboard, and shingle ...

"Wynnewood Park offers a playground for children. The open air, sunshine, the freedom from dangers of traffic, the velvety lawns, all combine to make conditions ideal for the youngsters. Near the park is the Woodside School, one of the largest in Montgomery County, and the children of Wynnewood Park find access easy through a short, shady lane where the trees meet overhead to provide shelter from both rain and sunshine. Just a few steps from Wynnewood will be one of the entrances to the new park which Montgomery County is developing along the Sligo Branch, a park which will contain bridle paths, automobile roads, tennis courts, playgrounds of all sorts and a swimming pool ..."

In fact, the description of Wynnewood Park applied as much, if not more, to Woodside Park, and after Jarrell took over the marketing of Woodside Park, he used the same themes in advertising both developments. Jarrell also paralleled Woodside Park's emphasis on architecture in his marketing of Wynnewood Park. Rather than holding lectures and attracting architects to build in the subdivision, he, through his Stambaugh Construction Company, built houses of varying styles for speculative sale. A rubble stone home designed by Gilbert L. Rodier to blend English and early American architecture was built at 9021 Fairview Road in 1929, and a half-timbered Tudor home at 1005 North Noyes Drive was featured as a Washington Post model home in 1930.¹⁶ There is a large wooden Dutch Colonial at 1014 Woodside Park and an Italian Renaissance home built for Jarrell's son and daughter-in-law at 1001 North Mansion. "Villa Carmen," a Spanish Colonial bungalow on 1003 North Mansion Drive, was advertised as having vari-colored stucco and a tile roof, with six large rooms, two baths, a breakfast room and a built-in garage. Floors were hardwood, the living room 18 by 21 feet, and there was even a built-in shower bath.



"Villa Carmen" at 1002 North Mansion Drive (Ad of May 6, 1928)

Today the distinction between Wynnewood Park and Woodside Park appears only on deeds; both are considered by residents to be Woodside Park. Although the developers of Woodside Park, including the Wynnewood Park blocks, were not as successful financially as they might have wished - the Woodside Development Corporation collapsed during the Depression and its successor company finally sold the last lot in 1944, while Thomas E. Jarrell built and sold the last Wynnewood Park home in 1938 - the slow development of the neighborhood cannot be attributed to the public's rejection of an emphasis on architecture and landscape architecture as important features in selecting a suburban home or home site. Rather, the Depression intervened, slowing both lot sales and home construction.

As a result of their emphasis on architecture and landscape architecture, however, they created a neighborhood that is now one of the most stable and best preserved in lower Montgomery County and one which could serve as a style book for domestic architecture of the early 20th century.

When the Historic Preservation Planning Staff of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission recommended Woodside Park for designation as an historic district in 1989, they said:

"Woodside Park was more than a typical 1920s development ... it was really prototypical ... Although there are many neighborhoods with some of the same characteristics and architectural housing types as Woodside Park, staff has concluded that Woodside Park is not only the most intact subdivision of the period, but also that its basic design and development is probably the purest manifestation of the '20s/'30s suburban ideal to have been built in Montgomery County. [Other contemporary neighborhoods do not] have the sylvan, park-like character that many subdivisions of the period aspired to but that few actually were able to create. Woodside Park did create this ideal sort of ambiance and has, amazingly, maintained it over the years to a great degree." ¹⁷

NOTES

1. Deed lists Internal Revenue tax paid, \$160; tax rate was 50 cents per \$500. Montgomery County Deeds Liber 324, f. 240; Liber 329, f. 74.
2. Inventory contained in letter to Theodore W. Noyes from B. F. Leighton December 11, 1914, in Woodside Park Civic Association history files.
3. Hopkins Land Company ads, Evening Star, Washington Times, Washington Herald, December 2, 1922. Washington Post, December 3, 1922.
4. Sales figures based on Internal Revenue tax amounts listed in deeds.
5. "Lectures Aim to Beautify Woodside," Washington Times, February 24, 1923. Hopkins-Armstrong, Inc. ad in Washington Post, February 25, 1923.
6. Evening Star, March 17, 1923. Washington Herald, March 10, March 17, March 24, 1923. Washington Times, March 10, March 17, 1923. Washington Post, March 10, March 18, March 25, 1923.
7. Washington Post, June 8, June 15, 1924. Evening Star, June 21, 1924. Layout of house is from resale ad, Evening Star, August 22, 1942.
8. Washington Post, March 22, April 5, May 10, 1925.

9. Pamela Scott and Antoinette J. Lee, "Buildings of the District of Columbia" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
10. Washington Post, November 8, November 15, 1925; April 11, April 18, April 25, 1926.
11. Date from Montgomery County tax records. Description from Pardoe Real Estate information, June 1994. Evening Star ads, June 1, October 26, 1929.
12. Washington Post, April 9, 1933, "Jarrell Co. Agent for Woodside Park."
13. Washington Herald, November 11, 1924.
14. Evening Star, November 1, November 22, 1924.
15. Evening Star, October 31, 1925.
16. Evening Star, April 13, 1929. Washington Post, April 27, 1930.
17. Memorandum from Historic Preservation Planning Staff to Montgomery County Planning Board, March 21, 1989.

Dr. Robert E. Oshel was born in Kansas and has resided in Woodside Park for 25 years. He received his doctorate from American University in 1970 and now works for the Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Oshel is chairman of the History Committee of the Woodside Park Civic Association, which plans to publish a history of Woodside Park this fall, in time for Woodside Park's 75th Anniversary. He reports that a complete history of Woodside Park is at <http://www.cpcug.org/user/roshel/history.html> on the Internet.

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