

MEADOW LODGE: 1898 - 1968

Combined efforts of
May Douglas Flanagan
and
Phyllis C. Maier



ROBERT E. STRAWBRIDGE RESIDENCE, "Meadow Lodge," Bryn Mawr

Mantle Fielding, Architect

The exquisitely picturesque home of Robert E. Strawbridge, of Strawbridge & Clothier, wholesale and retail dry goods merchants, is one of the most attractive of the many charming places of far-famed Bryn Mawr. The house, barns and servants' quarters are after the half-timbered style of English homes of the seventeenth century. The beautiful grounds comprise 50 acres, most of which is in fine pasture.

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This photograph and description of "Meadow Lodge" were printed in 1901 in an album published by Moses B. King, Philadelphia and Notable Philadelphians.

The reference to "far-famed Bryn Mawr" is corroborated by Mr. Robert E. Strawbridge, Jr.'s, recollection that his mother was a bit skeptical about purchasing property so far out in the country, with fears that they might never be able to get a doctor to come out that far. However, Bryn Mawr already had excellent doctors. Nearby Bryn Mawr Hospital had been serving the area since 1893 and the Hospital of the Good Shepherd, for children, was equally close in Garrett Hill.

Mr. Strawbridge remembers the house as a small square farmhouse, consisting almost entirely of the great hall. He says that the three subsequent additions were made without an architect or specific builder. His parents visited a great deal in England and brought back photographs of Tudor architecture. This house is the outgrowth of a variety of English homes which they liked, and not modeled on any particular one.

Mantle Fielding no doubt designed the original big house, as indicated in the 1901 illustration. Not only a prominent architect of the day and responsible for many noted homes and a few public buildings, Mr. Fielding was also a literary figure of some stature, the author of such books as Life and

Works of Thomas Sully and Guilbert Stuart and His Portraits of Washington.

The first addition to Meadow Lodge included the present-day library, which at that time was the dining room. The great hall in this first period was the living room.

The present-day dining room was added later when the Strawbridges found they needed a more formal dining area for the many occasions when they wished to entertain. They added the gallery at the same time, making it possible to reach the dining room without having to pass through the "smoking room", as the library became known. The gallery had another important function as the location of the first telephone in the house. We realize how historical this phone must have been. Its number, "Bryn Mawr 36", indicates the small number of phones then in service.

The last addition was made in 1930 when for the first time Mrs. Strawbridge brought in an Interior Designer, a Mr. Locke.

An atlas printed in 1900 shows the property as 47.185 acres with a brick house, five frame and two part-frame buildings, four of which were indicated as barns or stables. Mill Road was then shown as "Coopertown Road". By 1920 two more structures were shown, making a total of ten buildings.

Meadow Lodge's masters had an unfailing feeling for the beauty of Tudor architecture. The upright lines of the stairway tower, with its lead-mullioned windows and stone frames and sills, the focus throughout on the long bays of windows with many small panes, the characteristic Tudor archways from room to room, even used to frame the kitchen porch, and particularly the handsome fireplaces, many of which were apparently brought from abroad, all compounded the English feeling.

Interior

Entering through a wood-beamed vestibule, with its heavy door and peep window, a visitor is impressed by the massive oak chimney-piece in the great hall, its carvings combining many symbolic features, with a central term of a bearded man resting on his elbows, the whole framed by classic pilasters.

The decoration in the drawing room is more delicate, reflecting the effect of the European Renaissance on the English homes. It has a two-colored marble mantle with a white, beautifully carved central frieze of cherubs bathing, possibly

the work of an Italian craftsman. The delicacy is echoed by the plasterwork or carved deal garlands and baskets adorning the fireplace and doorways, and suggesting the Chippendale tastes of the mid-18th Century.

In the smoking room the wood paneling sets the keynote for its gracefully carved wooden chimney-piece, while the dining room's interest comes from its dark green painted walls with ormolu paneling and extravagantly ornamented lighting fixtures.

Mr. Strewbridge's recollections of the changes in the front part of the house reflect the life of the family and their guests, but with each addition to the living area, changes were also going on in the kitchens and servants' quarters. Pantries blossomed where kitchen had stood. Dining and sitting rooms became necessary as the staff was increased. As the back wing grew, more rooms were added upstairs until there were a total of 10 maids' rooms on the third floor, with one bathroom, in addition to the five with a bath on the second floor.

In the front of the house upstairs, and overlooking the garden, was the master's suite of two bedrooms with two baths. A paneled morning room has a hidden door connecting with the bedroom suite. It opens out on to an upstairs porch, shaded, as is the terrace below, by the two huge sycamore trees which are so important a feature of the whole home. The fireplace here proved the only one which could safely be moved and was taken by Mrs. Grovener, the daughter in the family, to her home in Rhode Island. The beautifully carved door, entablature and dado, and the mirrored lighting fixtures suggest another English room was transplanted to Bryn Mawr. In all, there are three concealed doorways in the house, indicating faithfulness to the English love of balance, which sometimes made it necessary to hide functional doors, or the reverse.

Five other rooms on the second floor with three baths, and three rooms on the third with another bathroom, corridors the length of the house, as well as countless closets, linen rooms and a trunk-room fill the boundless upper floors. Seven of the second-floor rooms have fireplaces. According to the labels of the bell system for calling servants, two of these rooms were listed as belonging to the son and daughter and three as guestrooms.

We are told that there were two or three safes for valuables upstairs, in addition to the sizeable walk-in closet in the pantry which housed seven shelves of treasures from floor to ceiling and was guarded by a now virtually immovable vaulted door, the product of the safe manufacturers, Stiffel & Friedman Company of Philadelphia.

In this pantry there is also an interesting piece of equipment, a metal warmer, perhaps of the type used in hotels, which must have been needed to warm plates or keep food hot on its lengthy trip to the dining room. To produce meals for the large menage required a kitchen 33 feet long, a stove which measures 36 inches, an ice box that is 108 inches, its ice compartment 30" x 40" x 44". The pantry sink is twelve feet long. One room was devoted to flower arranging.

In the dark reaches of the cellar were a room for storage of groceries or preserves and one for wines. The laundry, or "pressing room", bears mention with its four big washtubs, a metal ironing board whose surface measures two by seven feet and at the end of which is an apparatus heated by hot water pipes which apparently was used to keep irons hot. A two-burner stove was needed to dissolve the starch and heat water, and with the advent of the electric iron, we find three fuses in the fuse box, serving "laundry iron receptacle No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3". In comparison, fuse #10 guarded "small hall, back hall, lavatory, vault room, hot plate room and maids' brush room".

Exterior

Meadow Lodge is situated on high ground, as was so often the case with its Tudor antecedents, when defense was a prime consideration. Its half-timbered and brick construction are a reminder of the days when timber was plentiful in the forests, and stone costlier or difficult to procure. Many such houses are to be found in Shropshire and northward through Cheshire and Lancashire. Typical of these houses is the rambling effect of centuries of additions, the lengths of bay windows, the extension of line through the use of walls and appropriately designed and integrated out-buildings, the many gables and gablets, all evident in Meadow Lodge where even the spring house received like treatment.

Probably a smaller garden existed when the Strawbridges first built their home. The formal one is not shown on a 1908 map but is described as "flower garden" with walls by 1920. Actually there are now no flowers, but the garden's simplicity and symmetry of design again echo the Tudor character of the whole and bring to mind the older gardens of England.

The vista from the house carries the eye down a double descent to a stone balustrade at the far end, with evergreen trees forming the background and completing the feeling of enclosure ordered by the brick wall on the east. The wall is, itself, an architectural achievement. Topped with white

stone, it makes frequent adjustments of line and levels to adapt to the contour of the ground and to accommodate its many gates. Now the garden is largely grass, with trimmed arbor vitae, privet hedges and brick walks down either side.

Steps lead down to the tennis court and open-walled tennis shelter on one's left, while on the right is a terrace seat built into the wall, where one might rest to enjoy the fountain in the small fishpond.

As the English loved to do, Mr. and Mrs. Strawbridge had a stepping stone walk leading to an adjoining area set aside for a "well-managed wood" with its varied trees, rhododendron and laurel, in the middle of which a huge feeding station, nay restaurant, for birds is suspended.

The Strawbridges also, no doubt, borrowed from the English their cherry walk on the west side of the garden, where rows of flowering cherry trees flank the brick walk and make one wonder if it was not planned that they be trained into an arbor, as was so often done with peach and apple trees in the English gardens.

The cherry walk leads to a pleasant corner lookout covered by a pergola of wistaria, while a small garden house balances the other corner. We can picture the family and guests hastening to this little lookout when the baying of hounds signaled that Radnor Hunt riders were at hand and might raise their fox in Meadow Lodge's covert. From every part of the garden -- and of the terraces -- and, indeed, from every window, we can sense the Strawbridges' love of their countryside, all planned to be part of the meadows and stream on the property and the open hills in the distance.

History

Meadow Lodge's 47.185 acres in Radnor Township, Delaware County, were part of the Welsh Tract first settled by Quakers from Wales in 1681. The settlers came to America expecting their lands to be located together as a "Barony". Their protests took such forms as refusing to serve on jury duty when county lines were drawn which divided their tract. Previously part of Chester County, a further division was made when Delaware County was formed by Act of the Assembly, September 26, 1789.

The families in this particular area came from Radnorshire in Wales and gave their first Meeting House, established in 1693, the name "Radnor Meeting". Before that, meetings for worship were held in the private homes.

David Powell, a deputy to the Surveyor General, laid out the tract and was deeded 1,000 acres. His section of 111 acres, on which Meadow Lodge now stands, reaching southward to Darby Creek, was surveyed on 12th Month, 1685, and patented the following March. The names of the proprietors of the surrounding acres, Morris Llewelyn to the south, for instance, and the names of many of the local towns reiterate their origin in Wales.

Evan Frodderch (or Frythrey) became the next owner in 1701, at which time the land was re-surveyed and listed as 112 acres, 34 perches. In 1704 it became the property of William Davis, the operator of a grist mill.

A century later we find that Jesse Brooke, the son of Samuel Brooke, had established a flour mill on "the Creek Ithan, near the Haverford (Township) line". Of his ten children: David, Samuel, Alexander, Jesse, John, Margaret, Mary, Eleanor, Elizabeth and Anna, the son, Jesse, succeeded his father at the mill and was known as "Miller Jesse", in contrast to his cousin "Church Jesse" Brooke, who also lived in Radnor Township and was active in the Old St. Davids Church, and supervised the building of the parsonage in 1844. An 1870 atlas shows Jesse Brooke as owner of a large tract, covering both sides of "Radnor Road", now Mill Road, and reaching across the valley to "Mill Creek Road" (our Roberts Road), as did many of the properties not yet broken by the building of Bryn Mawr Avenue.

Ten years later, however, John K. Valentine had bought "Highland Farm", as he called his large property which reached southward into Haverford Township as far as the Coopertown village, a community of houses in the vicinity of Marple and Old Darby Roads, which still appears on current AAA maps. In addition to Mr. Valentine's stone house, there were a large barn and four other buildings.

John Reed Valentine, the son of John King Valentine, owned 63 acres adjoining his father's 113. Mr. Valentine, Sr., had already broken up his property, having sold 27 acres across Mill Road to Frank Dale Lalanne in 1886. "Alta Vista", as it was named, was modeled after the Chateau de Maintenon. One of the handsomest houses in the area, later owners changed the name to "Laurier". It is now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Tristram C. Colket, Jr. When John R. Valentine inherited the property it was, therefore, an awkward shape, and possibly that is why he sold the additional block to Mr. Strawbridge. We know that he continued acquiring property in Haverford Township until his holding was almost 300 acres by 1914.

The Strawbridge estate in reality was small in comparison with neighboring ones. Rudolph Ellis's "Fox Hill", comprised

over 300 acres. The farms he assembled included the James Moore farm, noted for the thoroughbred horses raised there, and the Davis farm with its Jersey cattle, sheep, and a breeding stable for 70 to 80 horses, who, according to the Rev. S. F. Hotchkiss, writing in 1897, "looked comfortable in their square stalls".

In that year B. F. Clyde, the steamship magnate, owned "Goughacres" with its Speed Track, at the corner still known as Clyde's Corners. Neighboring "Wootton" on Bryn Mawr Avenue was built for George W. Childs, Editor of the Philadelphia Public Ledger, by John McArthur, the same architect who designed Philadelphia's City Hall, a famous building in the 19th Century. Each of Mr. Childs' many famous visitors (Gen. Grant, Gen. Sherman, President Hayes, Mrs. Grover Cleveland, A. J. Drexel, and others) planted a memorial tree for himself on the property. Across the street was a locomotive-shaped house which was built by the Williams family of the Baldwin Locomotive Works. The mansions these men lived in were as far from "farm-houses" as their estates were from the "farms" they called them.

Each estate appears to have specialized in one animal or another. "Goughacres" was known for its thoroughbred stock. "Highland Farms" boasted 200 pure-blooded Ayreshire cattle and was "the mecca of Ayreshire cattle breeders of the U. S." It claimed championships in milk and butter production and was a model with its modern dairy machinery. Mr. Valentine also owned ten high-class thoroughbred horses and was respected as Master of Hounds for Radnor Hunt from 1901 to 1907.

Understandably, the designation of roads and streams has undergone many changes over the centuries. Mill Road, planned to bisect the township on a north and south line, was laid out in 1833 as "Radnor Street" or "Road". When Dr. George Smith wrote his History of Delaware County in 1862 he titled it simply "Old Road". As part of the route from Coopertown to Radnorville, it also bore both those names, and Mr. Strawbridge considered he lived on "Radnor Road". It was kept a small dirt road to discourage travel and served only the three families living on it then.

Indeed, many of the towns themselves are now only names living in the memories of antiquarians. Radnorville, Garrettville, The Hunt, Coopertown, Coreze, Whitehall, were all within a mile or so of Meadow Lodge and probably busy places the latter part of the 18th Century.

This name, "Meadow Lodge", comes, no doubt, from the name of Meadow Brook which meanders through its meadows, but it, too, is a new title. It was known as "Radnor Run" in the

days when "Miller Jesse" operated his grist mill on the parent stream, the Brook Ithan.

Many remember the smithy on Ithan Avenue whose fires have long since cooled but whose building still stands, as do the two schools in the vicinity. "School House No. 1", built on ground which was very likely contributed by Jesse Brooke, up the hill on the "Old Road", where it crossed "Mill Creek Road" (now Mill and Robert Roads) was built in 1835 when the Governor of Pennsylvania's wife became interested in education for rural communities and money was voted to build a number of such one-room schoolhouses. It remained in use until 1930 when it was converted into a dwelling.

The school was one of three in the township in 1870 -- each with a female teacher, teaching an average of ten months a year and earning an average salary per month of \$38.50. With the Township population at 1360, an increase of ten since 1860, there were 35 male scholars and 90 female. The average attendance in the three schools was 141, at a cost of 81 cents per pupil per month.

In contrast, a century later, the 21,607 residents in Radnor Township in 1960 are expected to increase to almost 27,000 this year. There are 4300 children attending its four elementary schools, and one junior and one senior highschools, and the average teacher's salary for its 235 teachers has increased to \$7,800 yearly.

The other nearby school was at Coopertown in Haverford Township and was built even earlier than School House, No. 1. The "C-20 Federal School", or the "Haverford Seminary", as it is inscribed over its entrance, bears the date stone "1797". Of wood construction, it had wood slab benches on three sides of the room, facing the fireplace and the schoolmaster's desk. The students' tuition of 3¢ a day, or \$2.00 a quarter, did not include the cost of books, slates or goosequills.

It was also at Coopertown that Griffith Ellis opened "The Frog Tavern". His application for a license for "the Old Trog" was the first requested in the Township, at February Court 1731.

The Strawbridge Family

The owner of Merdon Lodge, Mr. Robert Early Strawbridge, was the son of Justus C. Strawbridge and grandson of George F. Strawbridge (a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania). Justus Strawbridge was born near Reading. After his father's early death he came to Philadelphia and eventually went into

business with Isaac Fallowell Clothier to found the Strawbridge & Clothier store in 1868. The store remains under the family control of the Strawbridges. Foresighted in employee relations, both sons also contributed significantly to many educational and philanthropic organizations.

Robert Strawbridge was born in Germantown in 1871. He attended Germantown Friends School and Haverford College -- a hardy lot, the Class of 1991 -- five members were still listed in the Haverford College Bulletin sixty-five years later. He joined the store at the age of 19, was named a director in 1922 and elected vice president in 1927, a post he held until he was elected Chairman of the Board twenty years later. He continued in this office from 1947 to 1965 and served on the Board of Directors until his death.

We are told that until his last year or so he went to his office three days a week, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Among his interests were the Philadelphia National Bank, of which he was a director from 1947-1954, and the Bryn Mawr Hospital and the Church Farm School, on whose boards he also served.

His obituary which appeared in the Main Line Times, December 27, 1963 issue, describes him as a noted horseman and polo player, a member of the Old West Chester Polo Team, as well as a member of the executive committee of the National Polo Association. He was chosen Master of the Cottesmore Hounds in England in 1913, the first American to be so honored. During World War I he was commissioned a captain in the Army remount service, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel, the second in command of a Division. One of his duties was to buy horses for our government. These he procured in England, Ireland and Scotland, and we find later that he bought horses at the Dublin Horse Show to be brought back to this country for training as hunters.

His wife was Anite Berwind. A daughter, Anite, Mrs. Theodore Grovenor, lives in Newport, Rhode Island, and his son, Robert E. Strawbridge, Jr., divides his time between Old Westbury, Long Island, and Unionville where he still hunts.

Mrs. Strawbridge's interest in the Red Cross won her a commendation from Queen Elizabeth for her work as Chairman of the British Relief Auxiliary of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Chapter.

For many years the Strawbridges maintained a home at Oakham in Leicestershire, England, and would spend three or four months at a time abroad. These trips sometimes entailed transporting ten or fifteen horses and dogs, as well as the four or five men to care for them.

The kennels and stables at Meadow Lodge still bear evidence of their interest in animals. Some of the stables have burned down, but there was space for 15 or 16 horses, with a couple of "double stalls". Cows and sheep were also maintained.

Living quarters in this group of buildings took care of some of the men needed to care for the animals and grounds, the orchard, and the fields which were cut every two weeks to keep them lawn-like. There were two to care for the garden and undoubtedly there were chauffeurs, as well, to bring the cars to the front door from the six-car garage.

After his wife's death in 1942, Mr. Strawbridge found companionship in his three pet dogs which were constantly with him, one an Australian sheep-dog, one a Scotty-like mongrel and the third "just a mongrel". He usually spent some time in Florida at Boca Grande, and also participated in many of his former club interests, which included Radnor Hunt, The Philadelphia Club, the Macquet Club, Merion Golf Club and The Rabbit.

Mr. J. Stanley Reeve, a close neighbor and hunting comrade of the Strawbridges, helps us visualize their lives in his Foxhunting Recollections. His account covers the seasons 1921-1923 of the Radnor Hunt Club and contains many references to "Bob" Strawbridge and his wife. We know that they frequently entertained guests from England and on November 7th, 1921, it was "Admiral Beatty's Day with the Radnor Hounds".

When Bob Strawbridge asked for a bye-day on Monday November 7, for Admiral Earl Beatty, who was his guest over the weekend, there was great excitement in hunting circles ... Everyone turned out in their newest and brightest scarlet, and on their best horses, and we jumped more fences than we've done for many a day.

Bob put the Admiral up on his champion and most previous "Cottesmore", and the Admiral left the rest to Cottesmore, and Cottesmore did him to the Queen's taste. I'm sure the big upstanding post and rail fences looked formidable to him. A strange country always looks big to one. But that the Admiral is an artist in crossing a country was very evident during the thirty minutes' gallop the Radnor dog pack and Horace Hare's cleverness gave us today.

After Mrs. Strawbridge had presented most everyone to the Admiral, and the Press photographer had satisfied himself he had enough pictures, hounds moved off: the first draw being the big meadow below the Meeting

House. Hounds feathered a bit here, but could not really own it, so moved on through Fairy Hill, Bryn Clovis, etc., for about an hour. ... Hounds crossed the road into a wheat field and checked again in the Strawbridge pasture, where a herd of steers evidently fouled the line, but picking it up again just beyond, ran with a wonderful cry over the brook, through the swamp ... but scent apparently failed completely and the Admiral's run came to an end. But if the Earl enjoyed the day as much as the Rednor field, he must have felt quite satisfied.

Among those out were: Mrs. Strawbridge, Miss Ellen Mary Cassatt on her "Seven-to-one"; Mrs. Converse on "Merry Christmas"; Frank Lloyd on "Sherry"; Ben Chew on his pet "Cvist"; Nelson Buckley on his grey; Henry Collins on his black horse; your humble servant on his faithful "Poacher"; Dave Sharp jumping the big ones on a chestnut thoroughbred; Clifton Lisle; Miss Gertrude Conway; Walter Stokes; Miss Alexandre Dolan; Dick McNeely, and Mr. Lodine.

We find the Strawbridges were among those who participated in "A Short Sporting Tour, November 12, 1921". Evidently considerable traveling was done to join other meets.

Having sent my horses, Poacher and Locust Grove, to the Unionville Inn stables on Saturday, November 12, I motored to Brooklawn on Sunday afternoon to have a few days' hunting as the guest of that good sportsman, W. Plunket Stewart.

My host was just returning from a walk when I arrived, having gone to take a peep at a wheat field that 60 people had galloped over the day before. "Didn't hurt it a bit", was his sporting reply to an inquiry regarding the damage.

... Among the Cheshire and Brandywine fields during the week here were: John and Mrs. Converse; William T. Carter, the Misses Cassatt, the Misses Dolan, Bob and Mrs. Strawbridge ...

Mrs. Strawbridge must have been a true sportswoman. There are occasional references to her spills but nothing seemed to daunt her. On December 3rd, 1921, for instance, "A Six Mile Point from Delchester", "the field of 55 had thinned down to about 20 by the time we finished the run, ... among them being: ... Bob and Mrs. Strawbridge (she having quite recovered from her recent spill with Brandywine)" and again on December 23, 1922:

It was not Mrs. Strawbridge's lucky day, for she came to grief over a big fence again here, and had to

go home. ... I counted 15, including the Hunt Staff, in at the death, among whom, besides the Master, were: ... Bob Strawbridge, Jr. ..."

We can hope Mr. Strawbridge, Sr., if not their son, accompanied his wife home after the mishap. But only two weeks later, on January 6, 1923:

... All that were left of a field of over 60 were: Bob Montgomery, Mrs. Valentine, Bob and Mrs. Strawbridge, Harry Barclay and George Brooke III.

We also find her participating in horseshows. In the Jumping Class at the Cheshire Hunt Race, 11/4/21, she won a second place against 17 entries on Cottesmore. The horse took the blue ribbon in the next class of 37.

Cottesmore won the Championship of the Show for the second time at the Bryn Lawr Horse Show in 1922. On this occasion:

Isaac H. Clothier, Jr., took the lion's share of the honors and made quite a record in that he had 12 horses in the Show and ten of the twelve won blue ribbons, and of course some of them more than one. He also won the Widener Cup ...

There is an amusing account of what must have been a trying day for Mr. Strawbridge the day after Christmas, 1921:

The overzealous field galloped right on top of hounds before they realized what they were about. So Horace wished us all a right Merry Christmas in pretty strong language, that had the desired effect and considerably lessened the Field Master's (Bob Strawbridge) strenuous duties for the rest of the day ...

Throughout the journal we find references to days when the Hunt crossed Meadow Lodge property:

March third, 1922 ... through Fairy Hill and out to the Lugartown Road, where they swung left-handed through Bob Strawbridge's, and on slowly to Bill Evans', giving it up altogether in his meadows.

And again, on the sixth of February, 1924, when Mr. Frank Bonsal brought his pack of Harford Hounds and a string of hunters from England:

Fairy Hill, the first draw, was unfortunately blank, but only a glance at these Harford hounds as they went into covert was needed to tell the initiated that they were a handy, well-schooled, industrious lot. Mr. Bon-

sal waved them into the wood from the Strawbridge orchard, and very last one of them raced into covert and set to work with a will ...

November 17, 1924,

Our Lorday fox followed the Ithan Creek through the long meadow, then swung right-handed over the hill, and crossing the new Radnor and Chester Road, led hounds to Goughacres Wood ... through the lovely old walled gardens of Fox Hill, probably in honor of the late Mr. Rudolph Ellis, President of Radnor Hunt for many years, and on to New Blabon's house, where hounds bore right-handed down to the corner, and crossing Bryn Lawr Avenue into Bob Strawbridge's meadows, ran towards Meadow Lodge; but this fashionable, country house visitor evidently suddenly remembered the Strawbridges were in Leicestershire for the season, so crossing Coopertown Road, into Wooton, decided to pay his respects to Mrs. Drexel. ...

Indeed, despite Mrs. Strawbridge's occasional misadventures, the Strawbridges appear to have been skillful and successful horsemen. As Mr. James Friel, the present manager of the estate puts it: "It would have taken a truck to haul off all their trophies."

Meadow Brook's Future

The picture now for the Strawbridge Mansion has changed greatly. The neighboring estates of Rudolph Ellis, B. F. Clyde, George W. Childs Drexel, John R. Valentine and Walter and Stuart Wood have given way to the Booth School, St. Aloysius Academy and two convents, the Presbyterian Children's Village, the Baptist Institute for Christian Workers and the Haverford State Hospital. Subdivisions now encroach on Bryn Lawr and Ithan Avenues.

The Blue Route will be cutting through the fields and woodlands where Mr. Strawbridge and Mr. Reeve used to flush their quarry, and Radnor Hunt has long since moved west to more open country.

The last of the Strawbridge possessions was removed in 1964 and the house has stood empty with the exception of a short period in 1966-67 when the Tudor arches echoed to the happy laughter of a score or more girls from Cushing College who lived here while their dormitory was being completed.

The property has now become the possession of several business men who are seeking zoning approval to build an

"Meadow Brook" 1970

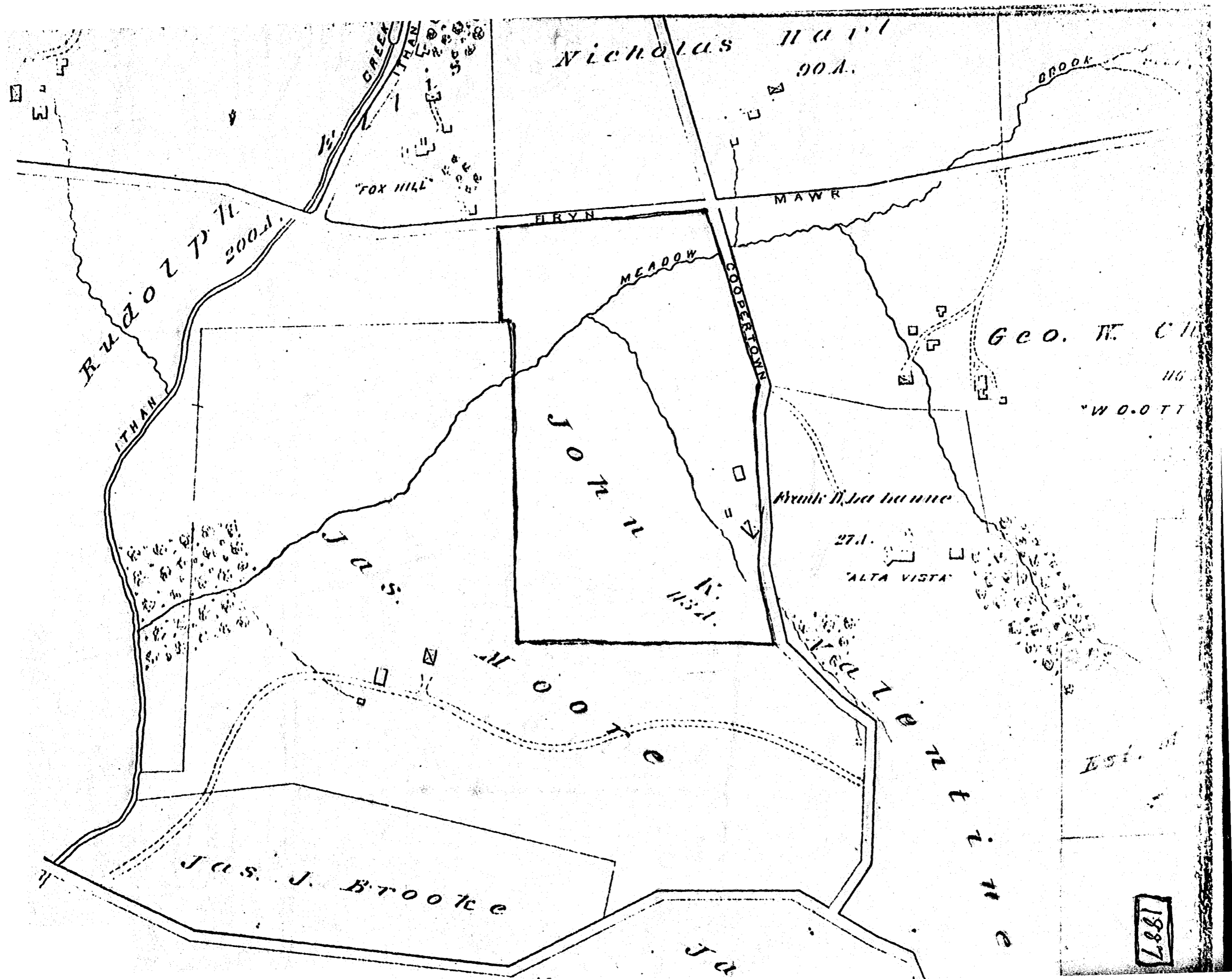
Zoning was not approved.

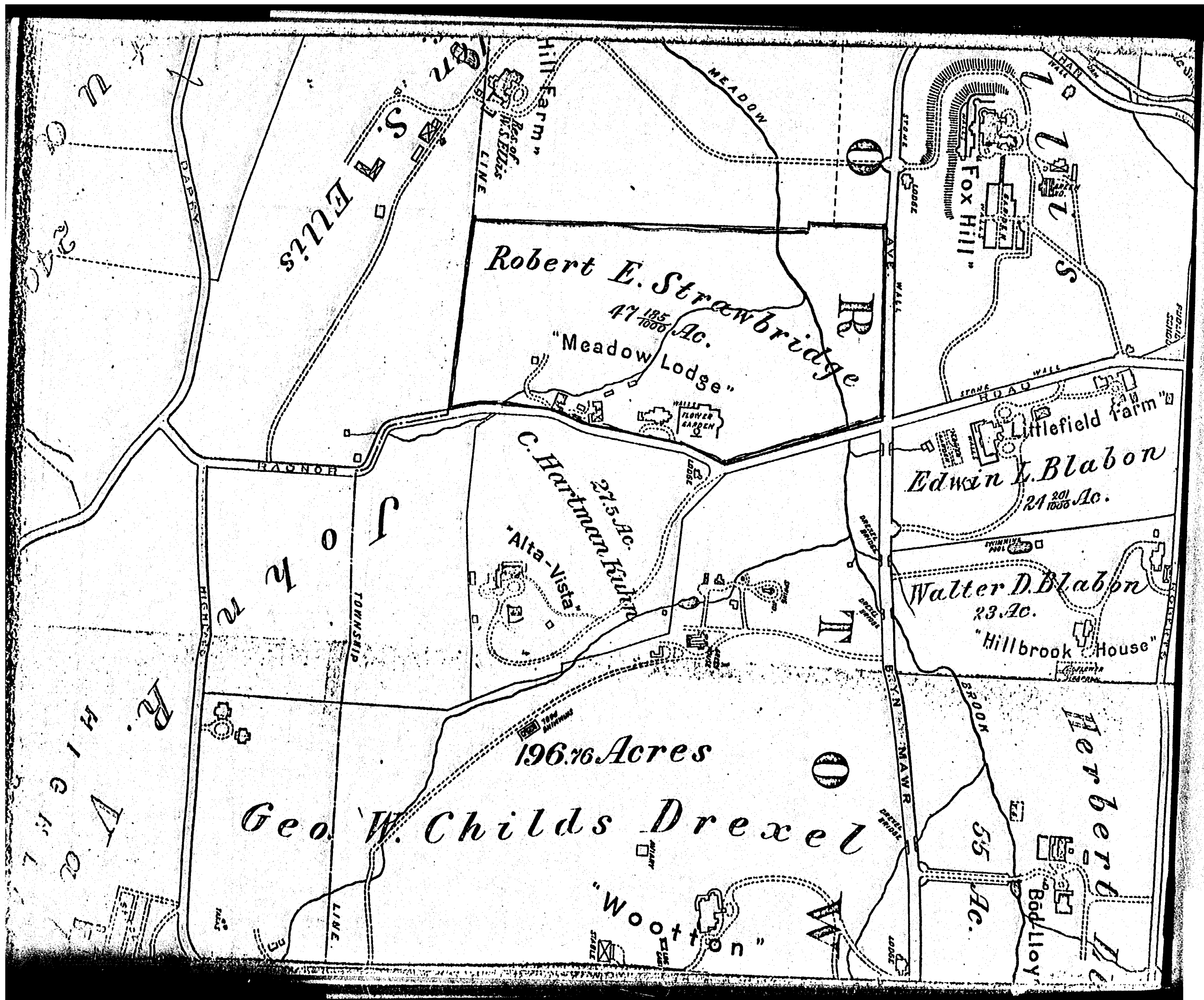
It was resold with existing
housing @ 12,000 an acre

apartment complex of 564 units, three six-story buildings, with tennis courts and a swimming pool. Their plans would make the mansion into a club house for an 18-hole, par-3 golf course for the residents' use, fronting on Bryn Mawr Avenue, thus bringing hundreds more to the peaceful valley upon which the Reverend E. F. Hotchkiss reflected in the pages of Rural Pennsylvania in 1897, the year before the Strawbridges began to build their home. He was writing of Mr. James Moore, long the owner of the adjoining farm:

... Walking along Bryn Mawr Avenue toward evening the drowsy tinklings of the sheep bells give a pleasing music not often heard in this region, but familiar to the English poet Gray, when he wrote his "Elegy" ...

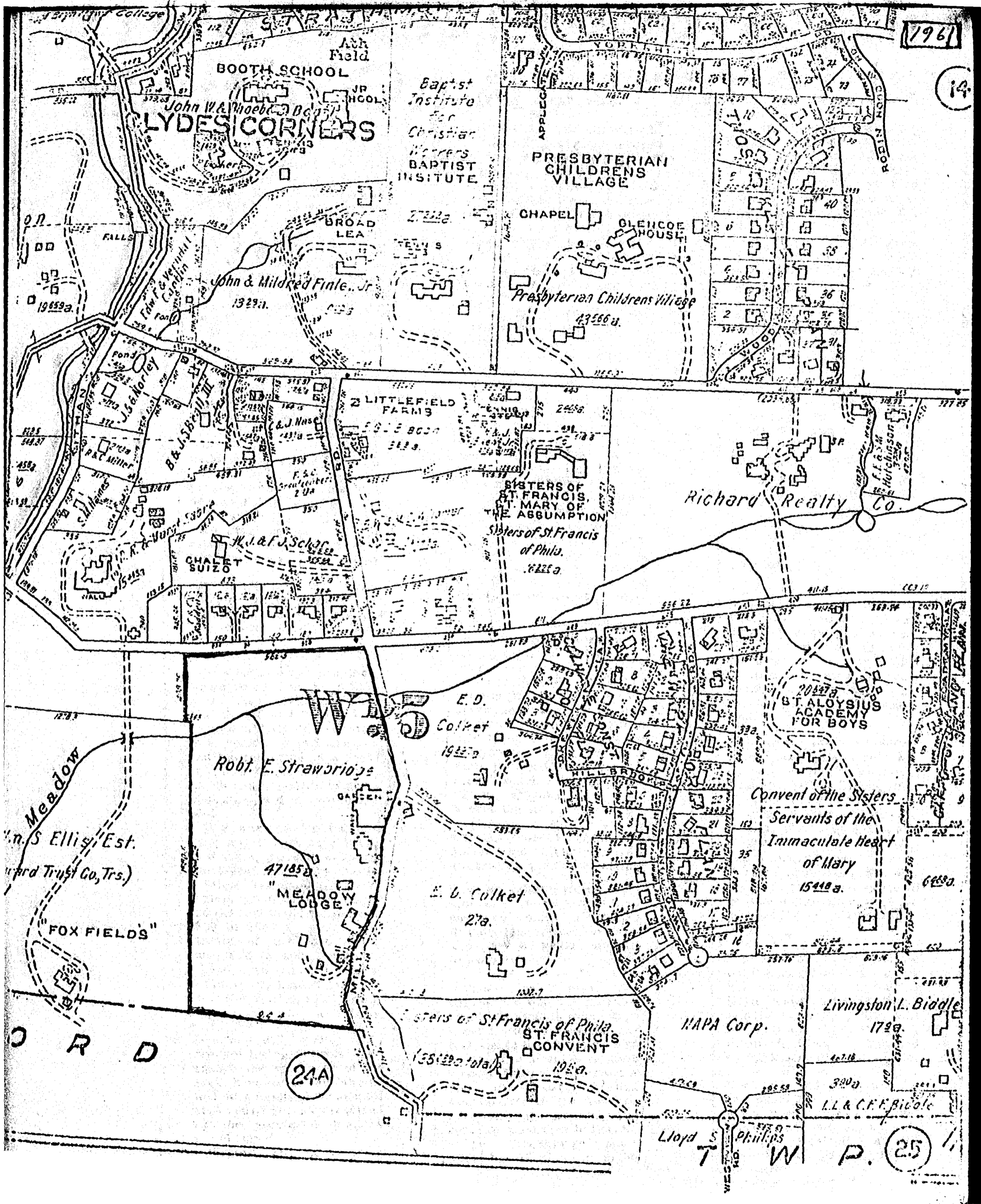
In riding homeward over the meadow where James Moore so often wended his way to business or to church, a thought of the good man and his worthy spouse mingles with that of those who now improve the acres on which he toiled for many a year.





1961

14



Two Sides Prepare For Battle On Apartments

Pro and con forces in the Thursday, March 14, zoning hearing before Radnor's Board of Commissioners regarding the old Strawbridge estate are girding for battle.

The 47.185 acres are owned by John J. Finley Jr., president of Wawa Dairies; James Nolen of the Philadelphia architectural firm of Nolen and Swinburne, and several other developers as yet unnamed.

The acreage is at the corner of Bryn Mawr Ave. and Mill Rd., Bryn Mawr, and is presently zoned R-1 (one-acre residential). The Finley group wishes to change the zoning to PA (planned apartments) and build 564 units. These units would require three buildings of six stories each and would be of a contemporary design. Models will be shown at the hearing, which will start at 8:30 p.m.

So great an attendance is expected that the township commissioners have moved

the hearing to the Radnor Senior High School auditorium, in Radnor, instead of the township building's meeting room in St. Davids.

* * *

The building, as proposed, would be set back from Bryn Mawr Ave. and an 18-hole par 3 golf course would be located in the front. The buildings would take up 3.52 acres and the rest of the land would be given to the golf course, tennis courts, shuffleboards, clubhouse and a swimming pool.

The attorney for the developers, Robert E. Porter, said the apartments would be considered in a luxury classification. The majority would contain two or more bedrooms and the rent would range from \$200 to \$500 a month. The density of the land would amount to 12 units per acre.

The Bryn Mawr Citizens Commission, headed by William Wooldredge, 937 Wooton Rd., Bryn Mawr, and Jane

Johnson, 905 Wooton Rd., charges that apartments would change the character of the area. Wooldredge said the land lies in a beautiful residential area and the services required by the apartment dwellers would ruin it.

"There are no shopping facilities within a mile of the

site," Wooldredge pointed out.

The citizens' group further claims that the downzoning of the area would be contrary to the present township land use plan which was designed to facilitate orderly development of the area despite the Blue Route's being nearby.

"The impact on traffic of all those people would be horrendous on Bryn Mawr Ave. The traffic would be unbelievable," claimed Wooldredge. "Although the developers might very well supply buses to go to the shopping areas, we know that the residents would have cars and would use them. When you compare 550 apartments to the

present one-acre residential zoning and consider the numerical difference, it is almost unbelievable.

"All the other apartments in Radnor are near shopping centers, but these would be way out of 'shooting distance' of commercial facilities. It just doesn't make sense to locate apartments way out there," concluded Wooldredge.

Porter conceded that no shopping facilities are planned on the land. He stated, however, that parking would be in the back of the building or underneath it. Raising the apartments on stilts to provide parking underground is also being considered by the developers. If parking is in fact provided underground, there would still be some areas provided for cars around the site.

The apartments would be only 1,200 feet from the Blue Route (the Midcounty Expressway), and Porter claims

it is unrealistic to think the site can be developed into one-acre homes. He thinks it more likely that three or four homes would be built to the acre.

* * *

Under present plans, free bus service would be provided by the developers to the Bryn Mawr station of the Penn Central and to the stores in Bryn Mawr. The developers have already built a similar complex, the Cedarbrook Hill Apartments, in the Abington area, and are providing bus service, according to Porter.

The Strawbridge home would be left standing on the

site, and the wall surrounding it. The developers presently plan to use it as a club house for residents of the apartments. Mill Rd. would be widened at the expense of the developers to allow for the extra traffic.

The Bryn Mawr Citizens Commission now has 400 signatures on a petition opposing

the downzoning. Most of these were obtained in November while people were voting. The association expects to get another 200 signatures by the time of the hearing, mostly from adjoining or abutting landowners. A two-thirds vote of the commissioners will be legally needed in order to overturn the zoning instead of a majority because of the number of petitioners nearby.

Henry Elliott, 913 Drexel Lane, has contacted the presidents of the various Radnor civic groups and asked them to attend the hearing and speak in favor of the BMCC opposition.

Elliott commented that the presidents of the following listed associations had told him they would give a favorable presentation to their membership of the BMCC position and do everything they could to line up their membership against the downzoning:

Aldwyn Lane, Ashwood Manor, Atlee, Community Association of Rosemont, Grange, Hillside Circle, Ithan Valley, North Wayne Protective, Radnor - Ithan - St. Davids, Wayne Public Safety, Wayne Terrace, Willowburn and Woodmore Lane.

The Radnor League of Women Voters is also expected to take a position against the downzoning.

* * *

Edward Wolf, new appointee on the Board of Adjustment, will be the attorney for the Bryn Mawr Citizens Commission. Assisting him will be Tristram C. Colket Jr., Philip J. O'Malley, Richard G. Park and William M. Rawle.

Expert testimony will be presented by the citizen group and a large fund-raising committee has been formed. H. Clifford Westcott of 917 Drexel Lane, Bryn Mawr, is treasurer.



THE ANTICIPATED THRONG which led to switching of last Thursday night's hearing on a proposed Bryn Mawr apartment project from the

Radnor Township Building to Radnor Senior High School auditorium did not materialize. Some 150 persons attended but many seats were empty.
--(Bill Harris Staff Photo)

Apartment Plan On Radnor Site Stirs Protests

Two petitions opposed to rezoning the Strawbridge tract for apartment use will be presented to Radnor commissioners at a public hearing March 14.

William Wooldredge, of 937 Wootton rd., a leader of the opposition, said the petition which began circulating last November to all residents in the Bryn Mawr area has collected 400 signatures.

A second petition presently is circulating to abutting property owners.

The 47-acre tract at Bryn Mawr ave. and Mill rd. presently is zoned R-1, residential. A developer, John J. Finley, Jr., has requested the property be rezoned PA, planned apartment.

Finley hopes to construct three six-story apartment buildings, an 18-hole golf course, swimming pool and tennis courts.

Wooldredge said the neighbors are protesting because they feel apartments will change the character of the area and because they will complicate an already existing traffic problem.

"The Land Use Plan calls for R-1. And the developers can't say that the Blue Route (Mid-county Expressway) will effect the zoning because the Land Use Plan takes the route into consideration," Wooldredge said.

"Philadelphia Inquirer" 3/15/68

Radnor Delays Ruling On Apartment Plan

A public hearing in Radnor to determine whether an \$11 million apartment complex will be constructed in the municipality was continued by the township commissioners Thursday night.

The commissioners delayed action until April 4 on a request by four businessmen that a 47-acre residential tract of land at Bryn Mawr ave. and Mill rd. be rezoned.

The zoning change was protested by Edward L. Wolf, a lawyer, who protested a petition against the proposed change signed by 20 percent of the residents who property abuts the tract. Wolf had another petition signed by 400 township residents against the change on the grounds of increased traffic in the area due to apartments being built.

Robert Porter, a lawyer, spoke on behalf of the 564-unit apartment complex before 180 persons gathered at Radnor Senior High School.

Testimony Resumes April 4 On \$11 Million Apartments

Even after four hours of testimony, it isn't over yet...

The Radnor Township Commissioners will hear additional witnesses Thursday, April 4, at 7:30 p.m. at the township building, Iven Ave., St. Davids, regarding John J. Finley's request to rezone 47.2 acres of the old Strawbridge estate for an \$11 million apartment development of 546 units.

The tract is at Mill Rd. and Bryn Mawr Ave., Bryn Mawr and the proposed rezoning from the R-1 (one-acre residential) status to planned apartments touched off widespread opposition months ago. Yet the crowd of 150 at the Radnor Senior High School auditorium last week was far smaller than many predicted.

At the time the continuance was granted, Robert E. Porter, attorney for Finley, and Edward Wolf, attorney for the ad hoc "Bryn Mawr Citizens Group," opposing the development, had completed their remarks.

Still to come, principally, is testimony from several civic groups. Present at last week's hearing and slated to speak at the April 4 resumption are William Wooldredge, Bryn Mawr Citizens Group; Ruth Tallmadge, League of Women Voters; Elliott Lukens, Ithan Valley Group; Arthur Moss, Radnor Civic Council, and Cassius Tracey, Wayne Terrace Civic Association.

One key revelation in Thursday's testimony was the identity of Finley's associates in the purchase of the tract: Herman Watkins of Merion, owner of 1830 Rittenhouse Sq. in Philadelphia and developer of the Presidential Apartments; James A. Nolen Jr. of Chestnut Hill, partner in the architectural firm of Nolen, Swinburne and Associates and a director of the Philadelphia Housing Authority; and Marvin Orleans of Cheltenham, a builder and developer of homes, apartments (such as Cedarbrook Hill) and shopping centers (Cheltenham and Bustleton Centers).

Finley himself is a Bryn Mawr resident who is president of Wawa Dairies and treasurer of the Liberty Bell

A model of the planned apartment development was on view during the hearing. If approval is given, the project will be six stories high and comprised of three buildings to be erected at the rear of the site. The apartments will be named Meadowbrook Park and will have a par 3 golf course for the residents' use, fronting on Bryn Mawr Ave.

Three witnesses were called by Porter: Drayton S. Bryant, a community planning consultant with experience from Montreal to Puerto Rico; John F. Curtin, 716 Hamilton Rd., Bryn Mawr, a transportation engineer, and Nolen.

Nolen described the design of the buildings and detailed the over-all complex. "The buildings are designed to form part of a segment of a circle and follow the natural contours of the land," he explained.

Nolen's comment that the apartments would be a luxury type (\$200 - \$500 per month) and attract people with grown children or no children was followed by jeers from the audience.

Attorney Wolf combed Nolen's testimony closely and scored a telling point when he asked Nolen if he knew the zoning when he purchased the land two and a half years ago. Porter intervened and conceded, amid cheers from the audience, that homes could be built on the site.

"It can still be used as a cornfield if you are willing to pay the price," he said.

At this point, the president of the Board of Commissioners, Bernard H. White, cautioned the audience to refrain from expressing its opinion by cheering or booing each time it agreed or disagreed with the testimony.

Curtin presented a detailed study of traffic conditions in the apartment area and claimed, "All roads in its vicinity have ample excess capacity to accommodate additional traffic with the notable exception of County Line Road" (at the intersection of Bryn Mawr Ave.)

The Cedarbrook Apartments in Montgomery County were described as having comparable traffic conditions to those for the planned apartments. Using Cedarbrook

Curtin projected 2,480 cars going in and out of the proposed apartments in a 14-hour period.

Using this projection, Curtin said, the developers had agreed to spend \$20,000 to install a traffic signal at Bryn Mawr Ave. and Mill Rd. and to widen both streets. Planned State Highway Department road improvements are also expected to alleviate traffic congestion, according to the traffic engineer.

The free bus service planned from the apartments to the trolley line, the railroad, and Bryn Mawr supermarkets is expected to curtail the number of vehicles. Curtin proposed that the buses leave the apartments every 20 to 30 minutes.

The citizen group's attorney, Wolf, queried Curtin as to whether the first deteriorating influence on a community was too much traffic. Curtin maintained that the best use of the site was apartments and that its use for homes or laboratories would mean even more traffic.

Bryant noted that the Mid-County Expressway, projected to be 1,200 feet northeast of the tract, would mean generally that one-acre residential homes would not be built, and two homes per acre would be more likely.

The planner further claimed that 47 houses on the tract would mean a tax loss to the township of at least \$8,000 because of the projected number of school-age children and the present assessed valuation and tax revenue. The apartments on the other hand, would mean a net gain of \$231,000 in tax revenue, he said.

Fourth Ward Commissioner Joseph W. Kimmel termed Wolf's unsparing cross-examination of Porter's witnesses "asinine."

"We are here to hear the testimony and we can judge whether it is true or not without the harassment of witnesses," he said.

Kimmel was particularly perturbed by Wolf's attempts to discredit Bryant's testimony by revealing counter-recommendations he had made at other hearings.

President White carefully

questioned both Bryant and Porter about the desirability of deferring a decision on the rezoning until the Radnor land use plan is revised, in six months to a year. Bryant commented that all zoning decisions couldn't stop until the revision is complete and said the owners' plans for the site could change in a year. Porter, on the other hand, seemed amenable to waiting six months.

Wolf called two experts to testify: David Longmaid, 213 Hildale Rd., Villanova, a city planner and Leslie Williams of Springfield Township, a traffic engineer and city planner.

Longmaid, past executive director of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, illustrated on a detailed map how the apartments would mean increased metropolitan sprawl in Radnor. He charged, "It would mean a planned development rather than a community development."

Longmaid further argued that Lower Merion has not lowered the barriers to apartment development along the Schuylkill Expressway. He said the noise from the Blue Route would be less than from a railroad or an airplane overhead. Shrubbery would also block out the noise and sound, he claimed.

"A five percent increase in the township population would result if apartments are built, and there are no services in the area. The votes of the apartment residents would demand more services and further change Radnor," Longmaid testified.

Williams rejected the Finley group's comparison of Cedarbrook traffic conditions with those at the proposed apartments.

"The apartments would result in an increase of traffic over single-family homes. This would mean a higher accident rate, more hazards plus increased air and noise pollution," he said.

Williams said there would be "no hardship in R-1 development. Nothing has happened to change the developmental concept of Radnor's land use plan and the zoning should not be changed," he concluded.



Inquirer Photos by Charles W. James, Staff Photographer

Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Strawbridge, Jr. (left), of Unionville and New York, at point-to-point races held at Radnor Hunt in Malvern.

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presented by,

Phyllis C. Maier

June 27, 1977

