

PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF  
HISTORIC PLACES

FOR PHC USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

10 November 1999

TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1. NAME

HISTORIC

Girard Estate Historic District

AND/OR COMMON

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER

Various

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT  
 BUILDING(S)  
 STRUCTURE  
 SITE  
 OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC  
 PRIVATE  
 BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- IN PROCESS  
 BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED  
 UNOCCUPIED  
 WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

- YES: RESTRICTED  
 YES: UNRESTRICTED  
 NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE  
 COMMERCIAL  
 EDUCATIONAL  
 ENTERTAINMENT  
 GOVERNMENT  
 INDUSTRIAL  
 MILITARY
- MUSEUM  
 PARK  
 PRIVATE RESIDENCE  
 RELIGIOUS  
 SCIENTIFIC  
 TRANSPORTATION  
 OTHER:

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Various

STREET AND NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

ZIPCODE

5. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See attached.

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None.

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## **Section 5: Boundary Description**

Beginning at the corner of South 17<sup>th</sup> and Porter Streets, the boundary moves north to the rear property lines of the Porter Street properties; travels west to South 19<sup>th</sup> Street and comes south to Porter Street; continues west along Porter Street to the rear property lines of the buildings on the east side of South 21<sup>st</sup> Street; moves north until Wolf Street and turns west until Passyunk Avenue; cuts around the property at the southeast corner of South 21<sup>st</sup> and Passyunk Avenue and continues along Passyunk until South 22<sup>nd</sup> Street. The boundary then travels south on South 22<sup>nd</sup> Street until Porter and goes west to include the properties on the west side of South 22<sup>nd</sup> Street; at Shunk Street moves east to South 22<sup>nd</sup> Street and then travels south to the rear property lines of the building on the south side of Shunk Street; at 2116 Shunk the boundary comes north to exclude the single building. South 21<sup>st</sup> Street the boundary moves north to Shunk Street and travels along Shunk to 2020 where it cuts south to include the garages between South 21<sup>st</sup> Street and South 19<sup>th</sup> Street; at South 19<sup>th</sup> Street, the boundary travels north to the rear property lines of the buildings on the south side of Shunk Street until South 18<sup>th</sup> Street. At 1818 the boundary cuts north to Shunk Street to exclude properties between 1820 and 1808 Shunk Street. At South 18<sup>th</sup> Street the boundary continues east along Shunk Street to South 17<sup>th</sup> Street and travels north to the point of origin.

## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Erected between 1906 and 1916, the Girard Estate Historic District represents a striking anomaly within the context of the developmental history of South Philadelphia. In this section of the City, as in much of Philadelphia, the ubiquitous rowhouse built on the property line defines the character of the streetscape. The Board of Directors of the City Trusts (the trustees of the estate of Stephen Girard) wanted something different. James H. Windrim, soon succeeded by his son John T. Windrim, planned an "Ideal City Homes" rental community of 456 semi-detached dwellings, with but one block of twenty-five rowhouses, as an urban response to suburbanization. "Gentilhommeire," Stephen Girard's country house, stands within a park that anchors Girard Estate.

Seven blocks, in a reverse "L" lying on its back, form the District. The shaft of the "L" runs between Shunk Street on the south and Porter Street on the north between South 17<sup>th</sup> Street on the east and South 21<sup>st</sup> Street on the west; the base of the "L" extends northward between South 21<sup>st</sup> Street and South 22<sup>nd</sup> Street with Shunk Street on the south and Passyunk Avenue on the north. The Windrims introduced into this parcel, delineated by the Philadelphia grid plan, Garden City architectural and planning principles. Except for the row on South 17<sup>th</sup> Street, all the houses are set back from the property lines and have front, side and rear-yards. Trees planted along the curbs of most of the streets create canopies over the sidewalks and roadways. The gardens, landscaping and trees, favored by the Garden City movement, afford a strong contrast to the typical streetscape of South Philadelphia. Larger lot sizes also characterize Girard Estate, with variations in dimensions ranging from 26 by 80 feet to 22 by 130 feet.

The residential structures within the District consist of two- and three-story, semi-detached dwellings with brick, schist or finished stucco facades, and one block of three-story, brick rowhouses. The semi-detached houses commonly present a single bay to the street; have a front porch at the ground floor; and in plan have a depth of four or five rooms. In the development, the Windrims used a variety of early twentieth-century architectural styles, including Bungalow, Prairie, Mission, Colonial Revival, Jacobean Revival, Tudor Revival and Craftsman. As built, the houses contained the modern conveniences of early twentieth century domestic technology such as fully appointed kitchens and bathrooms with hot water and heat supplied from a central power plant, now demolished. The Board also arranged to have a public school and a branch of the Free Library established within the development. A definite design change exists between the first two blocks developed, the 1700 and 1800 blocks of Porter Street, and the rest of the development. These first blocks, although trying to be cutting-edge, are grounded in the designs of the late nineteenth century. The designs for the rest of the development follow the new twentieth-century concepts in architecture, such as Bungalow, Prairie and Colonial Revival. This break in design may demonstrate the difference between father and son; however, because they tended to work in collaboration, few commissions can be associated specifically with either James or John.<sup>1</sup>

The bungalow-style, one-and-one-half story, semi-detached houses have light brown brick walls with a red brick band at the watertable and window lintels. Heavy brick columns support the overhanging roofline, which covers a front porch. The steep roof creates a side gable and meets the columns of the porch at a heavy modillioned entablature. A single, arched, shed dormer with three contiguous double-hung windows projects from the slate roof.

Prairie style semi-detached houses stand a full two stories. These also have brick walls and squared brick columns supporting a front porch. The full second story has three contiguous, double-hung windows framed in decorative brickwork of various colors. The hipped roof features a central chimney. The porch has a balustered railing, a deep eave with brackets and a hipped roof.

The District also has Mission-style houses. These, like the Prairie houses, are square and have a hipped

<sup>1</sup> Sandra Tatman and Roger Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects 1700-1930*, Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., p. 873.

## Section 7: Description

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roof. However, stucco finishes the walls and red tiles, not slate, cover the roof. In addition, many of the Mission style houses have a protruding second floor, with the overhang creating the porch on the first floor. This second floor has four double-hung windows across the front and a coupled window wrapped around the corner. Many of these houses have window boxes under the second-floor windows.

The District has two different houses in the Colonial Revival style. The first is a two-and-one-half story red brick building with a projecting front porch supported by both brick and wood columns on the first floor. The second floor has two double-hung windows, with window boxes and the dormer has a single double-hung window. The steeply pitched slate roof has a box gutter and a strong ridgeline dividing the twins. The second Colonial Revival style house also stands at two-and one-half stories, but is made of schist rather than brick. The front porch has only wood columns for support and a balustered railing. The roof of the porch acts as a balcony for the second floor, also with a balustered railing. The dormer has a triple window and pedimented ornamentation. The slate gambrel roof has a chimney at each end.

The one set of rowhouses in the development, on South 17<sup>th</sup> Street, represents the Craftsman style. These three-story brick houses have a recessed porch on the first floor, two double-hung windows on the second and a band of three double-hung windows on the third. A corbeled cornice line demarcates the lower floors from the parapet wall of the roofline. Along the row the shape of the parapet changes from a flat wall to rounded to flat again. Some of the houses have arched windows on the third floor. A wood lintel and columns support the recessed front porch.

The Girard Estate Historic District has three other buildings of importance. Gentilhommiere, the eighteenth century country estate and working farm of Stephen Girard, along with two service buildings, stands in Girard Park. The public school, built in 1913 in the Jacobean Revival Style, occupies the southeast corner of South 22<sup>nd</sup> and Ritner Streets. Third, the Passyunk Branch of the Free Library, a Classical Revival building, sits at the northwest corner of South 20<sup>th</sup> and Shunk Streets. The City of Philadelphia built this, along with twenty-four other libraries, with a grant from Andrew Carnegie. Later, the Board built garages behind the rear property lines of the houses facing Shunk Street between 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Streets to accommodate the automobile. These single-story brick buildings mimic the service buildings at Gentilhommiere. The churches that immediately abut the District do not constitute a part of the Girard Estate development.

Little has changed since the construction of these buildings in the early part of this century and the District possesses strong integrity. Typical alterations include enclosing the first floor porch, new windows, aluminum or asbestos-cement-board siding on the dormers, permastone, and storm doors. Some owners have changed radically a few of the houses; however, most changes are cosmetic and do not alter the overall appearance of the District.

The architecture of the Girard Estate Historic District provides an interesting mix of various styles that depart drastically from the brick rowhouses of South Philadelphia. Tree-lined streets, yards on three sides and Girard Park offer the area a large amount of green open space and distinguishes Girard Estate from the more dense developments typical of South Philadelphia. Girard Estate retains its character and represents a unique early twentieth century neighborhood of diversified architecture in an urbanized Garden City setting.

## 8. SIGNIFICANCE

**PERIOD**

- PREHISTORIC
  - 1601-1700
  - 1701-1800
  - 1801-1850
  - 1851-1900
  - 1901-1950
  - 1951-
- ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC
  - ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC
  - AGRICULTURE
  - ARCHITECTURE
  - ART
  - COMMERCE
  - COMMUNICATIONS

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE - CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW**

- COMMUNITY PLANNING
- CONSERVATION
- ECONOMICS
- EDUCATION
- ENGINEERING
- EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT
- INDUSTRY
- INVENTION
- LANDSCAPE
- ARCHITECTURE
- LAW
- LITERATURE
- MILITARY
- MUSIC
- PHILOSOPHY
- POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
- RELIGION
- SCIENCE
- SCULPTURE
- SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
- THEATER
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

SPECIFIC DATES 1906-1916

BUILDER/ARCHITECT James & John Windrim

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Board of Directors of City Trusts, the trustees for the estate of Stephen Girard, developed the farmland surrounding Girard's former country estate in Philadelphia to earn revenue for Girard College. The resulting district of 456 semi-detached houses, 25 rowhouses and one flat-house deviated greatly from the usual brick rowhouse development of South Philadelphia. The Girard Estate Historic District possesses significance for its design as an urban response to suburbanization, evocative of the "Garden City"; its association with a single architectural firm, James H. Windrim, succeeded by his son, John T. Windrim; and for its connection with Stephen Girard.

The District meets eight criteria outlined in the Philadelphia Code, Section 14-2007(5)(a, c, d, e, f, g, h, i). Girard Estate has significant character, interest and value as a part of the development and heritage of the City and is associated with the life of Stephen Girard, a significant person in the past. The District reflects the environment in an era characterized by distinctive architectural styles and embodies distinguishing characteristics of those styles. The houses are the work of two architects, James and John Windrim, whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural and cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation. The District contains elements of design, materials and craftsmanship, which represent a significant innovation. It relates to a square or park, Girard Park, which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif. Girard Estate, owing to its unique location and singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community and City. And finally, the area around Gentilhommiere may likely yield information important to pre-history or history.

**Stephen Girard's Legacy**

Stephen Girard (1750-1831) came to Philadelphia from his native France soon after the British left Philadelphia in the 1770s. A merchant by trade, Girard established himself in banking and insurance ventures and made himself the wealthiest man in America by the time of his death.<sup>1</sup> Although he had property scattered around Pennsylvania and other states, Girard's chief residence was the farm and house in Passyunk Township, now South Philadelphia, known as Gentilhommiere. Upon his death in 1831, Girard left his estate, valued at approximately \$6 million to various philanthropic institutions; however, the bulk of it went to the City of Philadelphia. The bequest included several conditions. The City was obligated to establish a college for poor, orphaned, white boys and the proceeds and profits of any business and investment ventures had to support the College. The City complied by establishing Girard College. Another stipulation in the will stated "that no part thereof shall ever be sold or alienated."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the City could not sell any property, including Girard's house and farm in South Philadelphia. This restriction led to the Board of Directors of City Trusts to establish Girard Estate as a community of rental properties.

1 Russell F. Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982, p. 293.

2 Will of Stephen Girard, 16 February 1830, Article XX as found in Cheesman A. Herrick, *Stephen Girard Founder*, Philadelphia: Girard College, 1923, p. 178.

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### Planning and Development

Design elements such as curvilinear streets, low-density, cottage-like houses and landscaped parks became synonymous with Ebenezer Howard's Garden City movement at the turn of the twentieth century and many of these features are found in Girard Estate.<sup>3</sup> The Architect for the Board, James H. Windrim, along with his son John, designed a community of semi-detached twins in various architectural styles rather than a more dense, rowhouse development typically found in Philadelphia neighborhoods. Almost all of the streets within the District have trees lined at the curb, many houses still have a patch of grass at the front and almost all of the buildings have side as well as rear yards creating a park-like setting for the District. The architecture of the houses has a wide variety of styles, including Bungalow, Prairie, Mission, Jacobean Revival and Colonial Revival. The Board wished to avoid the monotony of other developments citing that in their development the "exterior appearance is varied and ornamented, affording a pleasing view of the block."<sup>4</sup> The Board aimed to provide a suburban-like atmosphere for those who needed to live within close proximity to the City.

However, Girard Estate has one main deviation from the Garden City-type of development – the overlay of the Philadelphia grid street plan. The streets within the District follow the street plan of the rest of South Philadelphia, and the City as a whole. Although some of the smaller, secondary streets became wider in the District, the area does not have a curved road, a distinguishing mark of the "Garden City." The Board of Directors of City Trusts carved Girard Estate out of the farm of Stephen Girard, but the City of Philadelphia initiated and managed the road improvements of the area. Grading, paving, installing water and sewer lines and curbing became the responsibility of the City, not the Board. It was during these improvements that the Board realized the market potential of rental housing in this area.

Two other "Garden City" developments, Pelham and Garden Court, exist in Philadelphia. The Pelham area of Germantown, developed in the late 1890s, closely followed the design aspects advocated by the Garden City movement. The curvilinear streets of Pelham Road, Quincy Street and Lincoln Drive created a winding, country-like atmosphere within the City. Like Girard Estate, Pelham included low-density housing with a wide variety of architectural styles in brick, stucco or Wissahickon schist. Created by one developer, Carpenter Land & Improvement Company, Pelham featured buildings designed by several prominent architects of the day, including Horace Trumbauer, David K. and Lawrence V. Boyd, William Price and Hazelhurst and Huckle.

Garden Court, situated in West Philadelphia, is on the National Register of Historic Places. Also designed by a single developer, Clarence Siegel, Garden Court followed Girard Estate by almost ten years. Consisting of Colonial Revival- and English Revival-style houses designed by various architects, Garden Court created an area very different from the average rowhouse of West Philadelphia. Two characteristics define the Garden Court District, the presence of mixed-density buildings, large apartment complexes adjacent to single-family dwellings, and the introduction of the automobile in the overall design of the area. Garden Court, like Girard Estate, imposed many of the design aspects of the Garden City movement on the Philadelphia grid plan, but it included rear alleys and garages to accommodate the automobile.

One aspect of Girard Estate that followed Ebenezer Howard's vision of the Garden City, missing in both Pelham and Garden Court, was the "whole of the land being in public ownership or held in trust for the community."<sup>5</sup> As a result of Girard's restriction against selling his property, the Board of Directors of City Trusts

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3 Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) espoused a new design for cities in England in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His design of publicly owned land, with citizens as tenants, included a radial layout with public buildings at the city center, residences radiating out and a rural, agrarian belt surrounding the city. The design included curvilinear streets, vast amounts of open space and landscaping around each building. This design became known as the "Garden City" and was copied in part throughout England and the United States. Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, F.J. Osborn, ed., Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, revised edition, 1965.

4 *Annual Report of 1908*, Board of Directors of City Trust, p. 18.

5 Howard, preface p. 26.

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owned, developed and maintained the Girard Estate development as rental housing. This relationship of publicly owned properties leased to private tenants formed the backbone of Howard's ideal city. He believed that this economically structured community, in a park-like setting that promoted good health, would alleviate the problems that plagued existing cities, including overcrowding, disease, unemployment and class division.

### Architecture

The design of the houses in Girard Estate resulted from a father-son architectural team. After graduating from Girard College, James H. Windrim (1840-1919) apprenticed with John Notman and his firm in Philadelphia. There he gained a strong background in drafting and design. In 1867, he opened his own firm and won the competition for the Masonic Temple in Philadelphia, establishing his career. Windrim became a Director for the City Trusts in 1871 for a term that lasted four years. The Board then appointed him as the official Architect for Girard Estate in 1885.<sup>6</sup> Windrim's son, John Torrey Windrim (1866-1934) began working for his father in 1882 and soon established himself as an accomplished architect. By 1892, few of the firm's projects could be attributed solely to either father or son.<sup>7</sup> The work in the Girard Estate Historic District probably results from a collaboration between both architects, but the development of the area may reflect the individual styles of James and John. The houses built in 1906 and 1907, along the north side of Porter Street, reflect a late nineteenth century view of architecture. The stepped parapets and the attachment of the bays show an attempt to create something new, but demonstrate the lack of a modern vocabulary. Later styles within the District represent a twentieth century approach to house design. The influence of the Arts and Crafts and Prairie styles are evident in later houses. This division of architectural styles may illustrate the difference between the work of the father and that of the son.

### Innovation

The era at the turn of the century fostered an atmosphere of reform, and the housing industry did not escape from reforming changes. Advocates of the new Garden City planning philosophy also stressed the importance of clean, open-planned houses with a full array of amenities. The Board agreed, saying in the brochure for the new houses that, "the almost alarmed awakening of public opinion upon the subject of sanitation has led to widespread distrust of the old-fashioned ideas concerning the disposal of waste and the toleration of dust and ashes within the home."<sup>8</sup> As an answer to reformers' demands, the houses in Girard Estate had fully appointed kitchens and baths. A central heating plant provided heat to all of the buildings within the development, eliminating the need for individual furnaces. Reformers emphasized the need for a healthy environment and the elimination of the ashes from individual furnaces helped keep each house clean. Numerous windows for light and air, yards on two or more sides and front porches were included in the design of each house for the comfort and health of the tenants. The Board took pride in the workmanship and use of innovative mechanical systems in the houses. In the belief that well-constructed houses would fare better and create fewer expensive repairs, the Board chose the best materials possible and employed its own builders.

### Institutions

As a part of the self-contained community, the development's design also included a school and library within its boundaries. In 1913, the Board of Education built the Jacobean Revival school on the southeast corner of 22<sup>nd</sup> and Ritner Streets.<sup>9</sup> The school, designed by Henry deCoursey Richards, follows the Gary Plan for school

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6 "Girard Estate," as a Trust, encompassed all of the properties overseen by the Board, not just the area in the southern portion of the city.

7 Sandra Tatman and Roger Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects 1700-1930*, Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., p. 873.

8 Girard Estate, *Ideal City Homes*, n.d., p. 3.

9 The Edgar Allen Poe School is on the National Register of Historic Places as a part of the Philadelphia Public Schools thematic district.

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design and is identical to five other schools in the City.<sup>10</sup> Also in 1913, construction finished on a library on the northeast corner of 20<sup>th</sup> and Shunk Streets. The Passyunk Branch of the Philadelphia Free Library was one of twenty-five libraries built by the City of Philadelphia using a grant from Andrew Carnegie. Along with his generous gift for funding these libraries, Carnegie suggested their design. He advocated a design that included a large well-lit reading space, open book stacks, public meeting spaces, and a central librarian's desk all within a classically designed rectangular building.<sup>11</sup>

The Board also added a series of garages at the south side of the development to accommodate the automobile. Rather than disturb the design of the area, the Board built four long rows of single-car garages. The single-story, brick garages reflect the design of the support buildings found at Gentilhommeire. Area residents can rent these garages still owned by the Board, continuing the tradition of the City's role as landlord.

By 1916, Girard Estate reached its full development and the Board did not add to the site. Despite the development's grand success, the ideal public landlord-private tenant relationship espoused by Howard suffered its own problems. Rent increases caused friction between tenants and the Board throughout the subsequent decades and Girard Estate did not escape the financial troubles of the Depression. By July 1950, the Board sought court permission to sell the first of the 481 houses within the development. Like their rentals, these houses sold in record numbers, with the entire development sold in just over two years.

Now in private ownership, the community of Girard Estate has resisted large-scale change. The District, with only a few exceptions, has retained most of its architectural integrity. The changes that many owners have made in the last forty years include new windows, balustrades and roofs.

Girard Estate possesses significance as a clear departure from the two-story, brick rowhouse development typically found in South Philadelphia. The garden-like setting and architecturally mixed, semi-detached houses create a neighborhood unique in character and development. The influence of the Garden City movement and the vision of James Windrim, and his son John, provided a rare opportunity for the creation of a suburban-type of development in an urban area. It also allowed the City of Philadelphia, through the Board of Directors of City Trusts, to enter the real estate market as developer and landlord.

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<sup>10</sup> William Wirt established the Gary Plan for the School District of Gary, Indiana. This plan called for a revolutionary school building design that included several aspects, such as auditoriums, gymnasiums, libraries, spaces for home economics and shop and specialized interior spaces for various curricula. Jefferson Moak, National Register nomination, Philadelphia Public Schools Thematic Resources, 8 November 1987, Section 8, pp. 6-7.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Goodman, Philadelphia Register nomination, Carnegie Libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia, February 1993, Section 8, pp. 2-3.



**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

See attached.

**10. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME/TITLE

Laura M. Spina & Elizabeth Harvey, Historic Preservation Planners

ORGANIZATION

Philadelphia Historical Commission

DATE

May 1999

STREET AND NUMBER

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CITY OR TOWN

Philadelphia

STATE

PA

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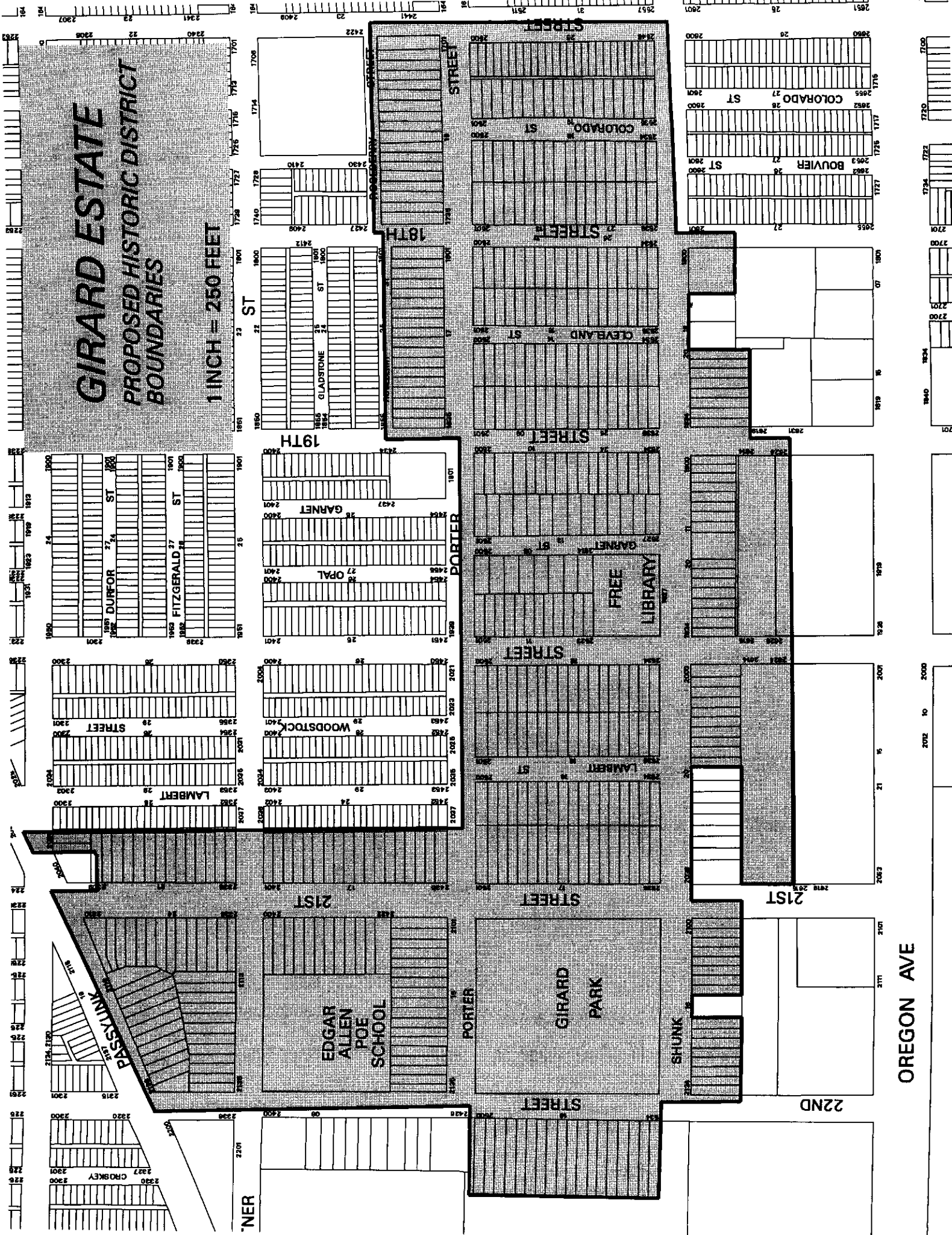
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# GIRARD ESTATE PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

1 INCH = 250 FEET



NER

EDGAR  
ALLEN  
POE  
SCHOOL

GIRARD  
PARK

FREE  
LIBRARY

OREGON AVE