

**ADDRESS: 29 AND 31 W BELLS MILL RD**

Name of Resource: Sugar Loaf Orchard

Review: Designation

Property Owner: AOB Sugarloaf LLC

Nominator: Kevin McMahon, Powers & Co., Inc.

Staff Contact: Kim Chantry, [kim.chantry@phila.gov](mailto:kim.chantry@phila.gov)

**OVERVIEW:** This nomination proposes to designate the properties at 29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road and list them on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Subdivided in 1917 from a larger Chestnut Hill estate and renamed Sugar Loaf Orchard, the properties include a 1917 cottage, a 1919 main house, and a 1924 tool house, in addition to a garage and barn. All five buildings and structures were designed in the Colonial Revival style by Philadelphia architects Martin & Kirkpatrick. The nomination contends that Sugar Loaf Orchard satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and E. Under Criteria C and D, the nomination outlines how the buildings exemplify the revival of Colonial Era domestic architecture in the early twentieth century. Under Criterion E, the nomination claims that the buildings are significant as the work of architects Martin & Kirkpatrick – later known as Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick – a firm which made significant contributions not only to the development of the country house, but also to institutional, commercial, and religious architecture in Philadelphia and beyond between 1912 and 1931.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the properties at 29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road satisfy Criteria for Designation C, D, and E.



*Figure 1. Main house, north elevation.*





*Figure 2. Cottage with barn at rear.*



*Figure 3. Tool house with main house in background, east elevations.*





*Figure 4. Barn, north and west elevations.*

# NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT

## PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

### PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)  
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

#### 1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE *(must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)*

Street address: 29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road

Postal code: 19118

#### 2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Sugar Loaf Orchard

Current/Common Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

#### 4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☐ good ☒ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☐ occupied ☒ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Vacant

#### 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

*Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.*

#### 6. DESCRIPTION

*Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.*

#### 7. SIGNIFICANCE

*Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.*

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1917 to 1924

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1917, 1919, 1924

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Martin & Kirkpatrick; Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Charles Gilpin

Original owner: John C. Gilpin and Lucy Disston Gilpin

Other significant persons: \_\_\_\_\_



**CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:**

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☐ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☒ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☒ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☒ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☐ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

**8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

*Please attach a bibliography.*

**9. NOMINATOR**

Organization Powers & Company, Inc. Date December 2, 2025

Name with Title Kevin McMahon, Senior Associate Email kevin@powersco.net

Street Address 1315 Walnut Street, Suite 1717 Telephone 215-636-0192

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19107

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: December 2, 2025

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: December 10, 2025

Date of Notice Issuance: December 16, 2025

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Aob Sugarloaf LLC

Address: 102 W Chestnut Hill Ave

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19118

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Final Action: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

12/7/18

## 5. Boundary Description

This nomination proposes to designate a historic property once known as Sugar Loaf Orchard, which today consists of two separate parcels under common ownership:

### 29 W. Bells Mill Road (OPA #092237812)

Beginning at a point in the bed of Bells Mill Road, said point being distant the following four (4) courses and distances from the intersection of the northwesterly right-of-way line of Bells Mill Road and the southwesterly right-of-way of Germantown Avenue.

The following three (3) courses and distances along the northwesterly right-of-way line of Bells Mill Road:

- A. S15°58'11", a distance of 181.483 feet to a point of curvature, thence;
- B. Along the arc of a circle curving to the right, having a radius of 570.000 feet, a central angle of 15°06'20", an arc length of 150.276 feet, thence;
- C. S67°04'31"W, a distance of 639.962 feet to a point, thence;
- D. Along a line connecting the northwesterly right-of-way line of Bells Mill Road with the centerline of Bells Mill Road, S32°48'29"E, a distance of 26.912 feet to a point on the centerline of Bells Mill Road, to the true point and place of beginning and from said point of beginning running, thence:

The following three (3) courses and distances along the title line in the bed of Bells Mill Road:

- 1. S81°09'31"W, a distance of 108.000 feet to a point, thence;
- 2. S64°42'31"W, a distance of 57.510 feet to a point, thence;
- 3. S45°47'31"W, a distance of 127.533 feet to a point, thence;

The following two (2) courses and distances along the dividing line between 29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road:

- 4. N23°43'10"W, a distance of 221.649 feet to a point, thence;
- 5. N66°16'50"E, a distance of 228.538 feet to a point, thence;

The following two (2) courses and distances along the dividing line between 29 W. Bells Mill Road and Parcel 88, Map 131N14:

- 6. S47°15'29"E, a distance of 104.056 feet to a point, thence;
- 7. S32°48'29"E, a distance of 109.135 feet to the point and place of beginning.

### 31 W. Bells Mill Road (OPA #092237814)

Beginning at a point on the common dividing line between 29 W. Bells Mill Road, 31 W. Bells Mill Road, and Parcel 88, Map 131N14, said point being distant the following five (5) courses and distances from the intersection of the northwesterly right-of-way line of Bells Mill Road with the southwesterly right-of-way of Germantown Avenue.

The following three (3) courses and distances along the northwesterly right-of-way line of Bells Mill Road:

- A. S15°58'11", a distance of 181.483 feet to a point of curvature, thence;
- B. Along the arc of a circle curving to the right, having a radius of 570.000 feet, a central angle of 15°06'20", an arc length of 150.276 feet to a point, thence;
- C. S67°04'31"W, a distance of 639.962 feet to a point, thence;

The following two (2) courses and distances along the dividing line between 29 W. Bells Mill Road and Parcel 88, Map 131N14:



Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

D. N32°48'29"W, a distance of 82.223 feet to a point, thence;

E. N47°15'29"W, a distance of 104.456 feet to the true point and place of beginning and from said point of beginning running, thence;

The following two (2) courses and distances along the dividing line between 31 and 29 W. Bells Mill Road:

1. S66°16'50"W, a distance of 228.538 feet to a point, thence;

2. S23°43'10"E, a distance of 221.649 feet to a point on the deed line within the bed of Bells Mill Road, thence;

The following two (2) courses and distances along the deed line within the bed of Bells Mill Road:

3. S45°47'31"W, a distance of 83.394 feet to a point, thence;

4. S55°56'01"W, a distance of 85.991 feet to a point, thence;

5. Along a line connecting the deed line with the northwesterly right-of-way line of Bells Mill Road, N36°05'59"W, a distance of 40.072 feet to a point, thence;

6. Along the dividing line between 31 W. Bells Mill Road and Parcel 55, Map 131N14, lands now or formerly Fairmount Park, N13°02'21"W, a distance of 530.246 feet to a point, thence;

The following three (3) courses and distances along the dividing line between 31 W. Bells Mill Road and Parcel 100, Map 131N14:

7. N63°37'09"E, a distance of 392.259 feet to a point, thence;

8. S76°36'51"E, a distance of 48.437 feet to a point, thence;

9. S83°24'51"E, a distance of 50.000 feet to a point, thence;

10. Along the dividing line between 31 W. Bells Mill Road and lands now or formerly of Dougherty & Morris, S05°27'41"E, a distance of 140.323 feet to a point, thence;

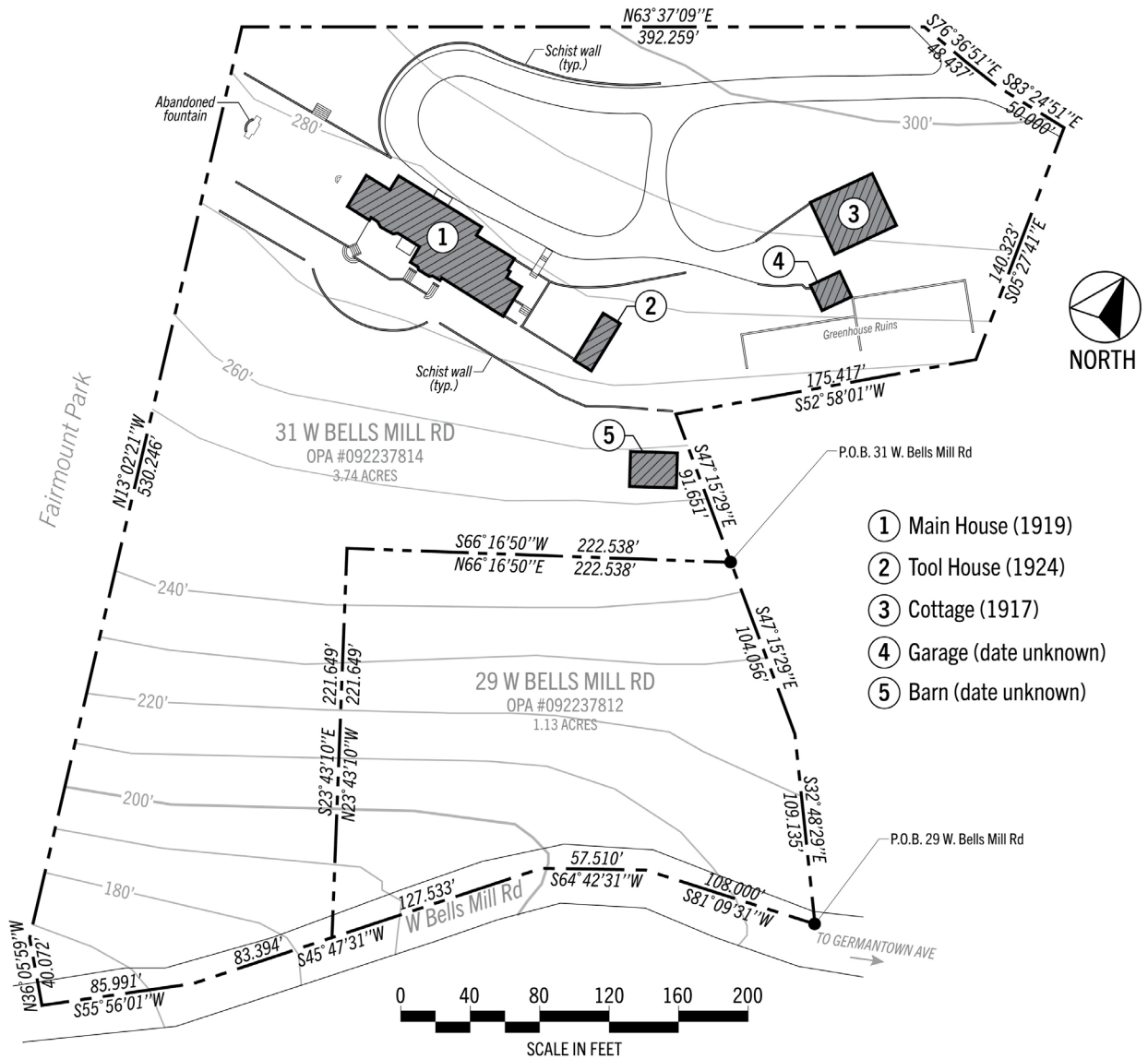
The following two (2) courses and distances along the dividing line between 31 W. Bells Mill Road and Parcel 88, Map 131N14:

11. S52°58'01"W, a distance of 175.417 feet to a point, thence;

12. S47°15'29"E, a distance of 91.651 feet to the point and place of beginning.

Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

Boundary Map





## 6. Physical Description

Sugar Loaf Orchard is a historic estate of approximately 4.9 acres on the north side of Bells Mill Road just east of Fairmount Park and the Wissahickon Creek in Chestnut Hill. The property is partially wooded, especially along the perimeter, and sits near the summit of a large hill, which has been informally known as Sugar Loaf since the mid-nineteenth century. Historically, the property was part of an estate known as Rockwood. In 1917, the estate was subdivided and sold, this portion being acquired by the attorney John C. Gilpin and his wife Lucy Disston Gilpin, who over the next few years transformed it into Sugar Loaf Orchard. The Gilpins completed the 1-1/2-story Cottage first, in 1917, and presumably altered the small existing structure to the southwest into a garage around the same time. In 1919, the Gilpins completed the 2-1/2-story Main House, followed by the 1-story Tool House in 1924 and a 1-story Barn at an undetermined date. All five buildings and structures were designed in the Colonial Revival style by the Philadelphia architects Martin & Kirkpatrick (later Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick), and have exterior walls of Wissahickon schist. The Gilpins surrounded their home with gardens designed by the noted landscape architects Emily Exley and Ellen Shipman. While the buildings of Sugar Loaf Orchard remain intact, very few traces of the original gardens have survived.



**Photo 1:** North elevation of the Main House, looking southwest.

A long driveway, entered from Bells Mill Road just west of Germantown Avenue, provides access onto the property. In front of the house (the north elevation), the driveway terminates in a loop, which encircles a lawn and has a low schist retaining wall along the far north side (Photo 1). There is also a lawn west of the house, which is terraced and has a low schist retaining wall and steps between the lower and upper levels. At the far western end of the lower lawn, directly west of the Main House, is a small stone fountain, which is one of the few remaining garden features. The fountain is in poor condition. South of the house, there are additional, much longer schist walls where once there were terraced gardens. Several sets of stone steps are found within the walls, between the various levels. Beyond the walls, the site slopes down steeply toward Bells Mill Road (Photo 2). Except around the perimeter, this area has been largely cleared of trees.

Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA



**Photo 2:** Site south of the Main House, looking toward Bells Mill Road.

**Main House (1919)<sup>1</sup>**

The Main House is situated near the northern boundary of the property, with the primary or north elevation facing the driveway described above (Photos 1 and 3). The house is linear but asymmetrical in plan and massing, consisting of a 2-1/2-story, five bay-wide, gabled roof main block with several wings – shorter than and set back from the former – extending to the east and west. The east wing is two stories, three bays-wide, and has a gabled roof, stepping down to a one-story, one bay-wide section with a gabled roof. The west wing is two stories, two bays-wide, and also has a gabled roof. On most elevations, the house has an irregular arrangement of double-hung wood windows in a variety of configurations. Wood casement windows also appear in the west wing. Nearly all of the windows have red brick sills. The double-hung windows on the north, east, and west elevations have painted wood shutters, which are paneled on the first story and louvered on the second story. The various gabled roofs all have asphalt shingles of relatively recent installation, and the roof over the main block has gabled dormers on both sides. The main block is bookended with stone chimneys with red brick caps, which are centered on the ridge line of the roof. A third chimney is found on the east elevation of the east wing, slightly off center of the gabled roof.



**Photo 3:** North elevation, Main House, looking south.

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Building Inspection, City of Philadelphia, Building Permit #2390 (1919).



Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

The north or primary elevation contains the main entrance, which consists of a painted six-panel wood door situated near the center of the main block. The door is framed by red brick quoins, which are keyed into the surrounding schist wall. Above the door is a sloped canopy, which has a standing seam copper roof and is supported by painted wood corbels on each side. Immediately east of the entrance is a small, 2-over-4, double-hung wood window. All other bays on the north elevation of the main block feature larger double-hung windows, which primarily appear as single units, but also in the some of the outer bays in groups of two or three with painted wood mullions between. The configurations of the double-hung windows are primarily 6-over-6, but the wide opening west of the entrance on the first story contains an 8-over-8 window flanked by 4-over-4 windows. Similar double-hung windows are found on the east and west elevations of the main block, and in the dormers. Above the second-story windows, the eaves of the roof feature painted wood modillion blocks.

In the east wing, the fenestration on the north and east elevations of the two-story section is similar to the main block, with a variety of double-hung window types, mostly 6-over-6. The north elevation also has a modillion treatment at the eaves. The one-story section of the east wing, which primarily serves as an enclosed porch, has a half-round opening with a wood-framed screen on the north elevation. A similar half-round opening is found on the east elevation, but here half of the opening extends down to the floor and contains a wood screen door, which provides access into the porch from the adjacent terrace. Just south of this opening, the east elevation has a small 2-over-4 double-hung wood window.



**Photo 4:** West elevation, Main House, looking southeast.



**Photo 5:** South elevation, Main House, looking northeast.

In the west wing, the first story contains wood casement doors with half-round fan light transoms on all three elevations (Photos 4 and 5). Each of the openings contains a pair of twelve-light doors, of which there are two on the north elevation, three on the west elevation, and another two on the south elevation. At the second story, the north and south elevations each have two pairs of fifteen-light wood casement windows with a painted wood pilaster serving as a mullion between each pair. On the west elevation, the second story has three pairs of 1-over-1, double-hung wood windows, again with pilaster mullions between each pair. Above the second-story windows, this gabled end wall consists not of schist stone as found everywhere else, but rather is clad in painted wood siding.

Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

Within the siding, centered just below the peak of the roof, is a small, eight-light wood casement window with an arched head.



**Photo 6:** South elevation, Main House, looking north.



**Photo 7:** Walled area south of Main House, looking west.

Moving eastward from the west wing, the south elevations of the main block and east wing are more irregular than on the north elevation (Photos 5 and 6). The first two bays east of the west wing contain a pent roof with asphalt shingles between the first and second stories. The pent roof divides two large, three-sided bay windows – one on each story – in the first bay. The bay windows both contain a pair of 6-over-6 double-hung wood sash in the center with narrower 4-over-4 double-hung sash on each side. The pent roof also extends across the rear entrance, which is currently concealed by original painted wood shutters, in the next bay to the east. Here, a gabled portico supported by wrought iron columns extends slightly outward to provide shelter over the entrance. At the second story, directly above the entrance, is an 8-over-8, double-hung wood window. On this part of the south elevation, there are also three gabled dormers with 8-over-8, double-hung wood windows.

Just east of the entrance, a two bay-wide section of the south elevation – referred to below as the south wing for clarity – extends out by one bay (Photos 6 and 8). At the first story, the south elevation of the south wing has a bay window similar to those described above, as well as a fixed six-light wood window at the basement level and a pair of 6-over-6, double-hung wood windows at the second story. There are additional double-hung windows on the west elevation of the south wing at both stories.

East of the south wing, the primary face of the south elevation extends another three bays and consists of a long schist wall with various 6-over-6, double-hung wood windows in all three bays at the raised basement and first story (Photos 6 and 8). One exception is in the westernmost bay at the basement level, which does not contain a window. The windows appear in pairs in the center bay and as single units in the outer bays. On this part of the south elevation, the schist exterior wall terminates at the second story. Here, the second story consists of a wide shed dormer, which is clad in painted wood siding and has three 6-over-6, double-hung wood windows.



Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

From the south elevation, a schist wall with red brick coping extends eastward to the tool house (Photo 9). Within the wall close to the house is an arched opening, which is topped by a gabled roof supported by painted wood corbels on both sides and contains a painted wood gate with iron strap hinges. The wall encloses the south side of a small garden between the main house and tool house south of the driveway.



**Photo 8:** South elevation, Main House, looking northwest.



**Photo 9:** Wall between Main House and Tool House, looking north.

**Tool House (1924)<sup>2</sup>**

Built in 1924, the Tool House, as it is called in the original building permit, is a small, one-story rectangular building with a hipped asphalt shingle roof (Photos 10-12). The building is nestled into the hill south of the driveway, leaving only a small sliver of the north elevation visible above grade. In its exterior treatments – schist walls with red brick windowsills and coping along the top of the wall, under the eaves – the tool house is similar to the Main House.



**Photo 10:** South and east elevations, Tool House, looking northwest.



**Photo 11:** East elevations, Tool House and Main House, looking southwest.

On the south elevation, there is an eight-light, glazed wood door. On the east elevation, there is a pair of twelve-light, glazed wood doors in the center bay, a nine-light wood window to the south, and a shorter eight-light window to the north where the hill slopes down and covers a portion of the

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Building Inspection, City of Philadelphia, Building Permit #12033 (1924).



Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

exterior wall. The west elevation, which faces the main house, has a wide opening supported by a single painted wood column in the center. South of this opening, the west elevation is clad in painted wood siding.



**Photo 12:** West elevation, Tool House, looking east.

**Cottage (1917)<sup>3</sup>**

Situated about 175 feet northeast of the Main House, the Cottage is a 1-1/2-story building with a rectangular plan, schist exterior walls, and gabled roof with slate shingles (Photos 13-16). Built in 1917, the Cottage was the first building the Gilpins completed at Sugar Loaf Orchard. The Cottage is built into the hill; due to the change in grade, the basement level is fully exposed on the west and south elevations. An offshoot of the main driveway curves around to the garage doors in the basement level on the west elevation. A schist retaining wall with red brick coping extends out from the west elevation of the building, along the north side of the driveway.



**Photo 13:** Cottage, east and north elevations, looking southwest.



**Photo 14:** Cottage, north and west elevations, looking southeast.

The north or primary elevation of the Cottage, which is five bays-wide, faces the main driveway. On the first story, the center bay has a painted, glazed wood door, which is situated under a gable-roofed portico with painted wood posts. The bays on either side of the portico all contain 6-over-6, double-hung wood windows with brick sills, painted, two-panel wood shutters, and exterior aluminum

<sup>3</sup> Bureau of Building Inspection, City of Philadelphia, Building Permit #5432 (1917).



Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

storms. At the upper story, there are two gabled dormers, which also have 6-over-6, double-hung wood windows, also with aluminum storms.

On the west elevation, the basement level contains three roll-down, painted wood garage doors. A continuous concrete header extends across the top of all three doors, and a pent roof with slate shingles extends out over them. At the first story, there are three 6-over-6, double-hung wood windows with red brick sills and painted two-panel wood shutters. At the second story, there are two windows, both with brick sills. The window closest to the north elevation is a six-light vinyl replacement window. The other is a single-light vinyl replacement window of identical overall dimensions.



**Photo 15:** Cottage, south and east elevations, looking northwest.



**Photo 16:** Cottage, south elevation, looking north with the greenhouse ruins in the foreground.

The east elevation consists of a gable end wall with a buttress-like chimney projecting out from the center. North of the chimney, there is 6-over-6, double-hung wood window at the first story. South of the chimney, there is a painted, glazed wood door with a modern aluminum storm door, as well as a small 4-over-4, double-hung wood window. A pent roof with slate shingles extends from the chimney across the top of the door and window. At the second story, there are six-light wood casement windows on both sides of the chimney.

Due to the change in grade – the site slopes down to the south – the basement level is fully exposed on the south elevation. Here, the second bay in from the east elevation has a painted, glazed wood door. The other four bays at the basement level contain 6-over-6, double-hung wood windows with red brick sills and painted two-panel shutters. The first and second stories consist of continuous pent-roofed dormers, which are clad in slate shingles. The dormer at the first story contains several non-historic vinyl or aluminum sliding windows. The second-story dormer contains three 6-over-6, double-hung windows with exterior aluminum storms.

**Garage** (Original date of construction not known. Altered in 1917)

At the southwest corner of the Cottage is a small, one-story garage, which has schist walls and a gabled roof with slate shingles (Photo 14). The garage completely open on the north side. In its current form the garage dates to 1917 but historically was part of a complex of greenhouses situated

Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

downhill from (south of) the Cottage (Photo 16). The greenhouses, which were likely added by the Thompson family and therefore predate the Gilpins' ownership, survive in ruined form. Only the schist exterior walls remain.

**Barn** (Date of construction not known)

The Barn, which is built into the hill approximately 65' southeast of the Main House is a 1-1/2-story structure, roughly square in plan with schist walls and a gabled asphalt shingle roof (Photos 17 and 18). The date of construction is unknown. However, based on the fact that the stonework and brick windowsills match the Main House and Cottage, it was probably designed by Martin & Kirkpatrick (or its successor firm) and built during the late 1910s or 1920s. This structure does not mentioned in any of the building permits cited above.



**Photo 17:** Barn, north and west elevations, looking southeast.



**Photo 18:** Barn, west and south elevations, looking northeast.

Due to the change in grade, only the second story is visible on the north elevation. Here, there is a pair of painted, three-panel wood doors. The east and west elevations each contain two six-light, horizontally pivoting wood windows with red brick sills. On the south elevation, there is a large opening in the lower level currently containing makeshift plywood doors. The upper level, which is clad in painted board and batten wood siding, contains a painted, glazed wood door centered below the peak of the gabled roof.

## Photo Key Plan





## 7. Statement of Significance

Sugar Loaf Orchard exemplifies the revival of Colonial Era domestic architecture in the Philadelphia region in the early years of the twentieth century. Between about 1900 and 1930, Philadelphia designers created a form of residential architecture, which, though related to the broader Colonial Revival style, was unique to the region. Based on the vernacular forms and materials of the eighteenth-century Pennsylvania farmhouse, this distinctive local type of residential building – characterized by its informality and prevalent use of locally quarried schist stone – became a defining feature of Philadelphia’s suburban built environment during this period. Sugar Loaf Orchard is also a notable work by the Philadelphia architects Martin & Kirkpatrick – later known as Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick – a firm which made significant contributions not only to the development of the country house, but also to institutional, commercial, and religious architecture in Philadelphia and across the country between 1912 and 1931.

As an important example of an early-twentieth century Colonial Revival country house in Philadelphia, and as a significant work by the architects Martin & Kirkpatrick (later Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick), Sugar Loaf Orchard merits listing in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places by satisfying the following criteria:

Criterion C: Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style.

Criterion D: Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen.

Criterion E: Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation.

### **Sugar Loaf Orchard: A Brief Historical Overview**

Sugar Loaf Orchard was built by Philadelphia attorney John Clayton Gilpin (1881-1963) and his wife Lucy Disston Gilpin (1884-1979), both of whom came from wealthy, socially connected families. Gilpin was both the grandson of Charles Gilpin, the last pre-consolidation mayor of Philadelphia, and great-grandson of Matthias Baldwin, founder of the famous Baldwin Locomotive Works. Gilpin’s wife Lucy, born Lucy Fleming Disston, was the daughter of Jacob S. Disston, youngest son of Henry Disston and later treasurer of the world-renowned saw manufacturing business established by his father. Married in 1914, the Gilpins lived in Chestnut Hill for several years before they built their new home on Bells Mill Road.

The Gilpin property, which the couple acquired in 1917, was part of an old estate known as Rockwood, a sixteen-acre property on which John J. and Elizabeth A. Thompson had built a large stone mansion in the Gothic Revival style around 1869 (Fig. 1).<sup>4</sup> Rockwood was situated on a large hill north of Bells Mill Road between Germantown Avenue and the Wissahickon Creek, a hill which, by the mid-nineteenth century, had become known as the Sugar Loaf for its resemblance to a loaf of

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<sup>4</sup> Deed of Sale from A.G.B. Steel to Lucy D. Gilpin, June 18, 1917, Philadelphia Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book J.M.H. 226, page 191; Kenneth J. Basalik and Philip Ruth, “Phase IA Archaeological Survey of Chestnut Hill College, Sugarloaf Campus,” Cultural Heritage Services, Inc., March 2022 (PHMC #2022PR00666).

Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

sugar.<sup>5</sup> In 1917, the Thompsons' descendants finally sold Rockwood, which was acquired by the financier Alfred G.B. Steel and his wife Amy Howe Steel.<sup>6</sup> The Steels, who renamed the estate "Sugarloaf," almost immediately sold the southwestern portion of the property, an area of about 4.9 acres, to the Gilpins (Fig. 2).



**Figure 1** Bromley's Atlas of the 22nd Ward of the City of Philadelphia, 1911.



**Figure 2** Bromley's Atlas of the 22nd Ward of the City of Philadelphia, 1923. Please note: this map does not accurately depict the exact position of all buildings.

The Gilpins began construction on their home a few months after acquiring the property in 1917. Designed by the firm of Martin & Kirkpatrick, the modestly sized Cottage was completed first, followed by the much larger Main House in 1919. Built of schist stone, the buildings reflected a local and regional version of the Colonial Revival style – based on the early Pennsylvania farmhouse – which became popular across the region between about 1900 and 1930. In the early years, the Gilpins called their home both “Sugar Loaf Lodge” and “Sugar Loaf Cottage.” Exactly when the Gilpins modified the name to “Sugar Loaf Orchard” is unknown, but this change appears to have taken place sometime in the 1920s and was based on the fact that the property contained many “old apple trees.”<sup>7</sup> During this time, the Gilpins, with the help of the noted landscape architects Emily Exley and Ellen Shipman, developed the gardens around the main house. According to one source, the property had “A terraced hillside garden, with ... good flower borders,” which was “planted with

<sup>5</sup> John J. MacFarlane, *History of Early Chestnut Hill* (City History Society of Philadelphia, 1927), 131.

<sup>6</sup> Deed of Sale from Philadelphia Trust Company to Richard C. Ellis, June 18, 1917, Philadelphia Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book J.M.H. 184, page 394; Deed of Sale from Richard C. Ellis to Amy Howe Steel, June 18, 1917, Philadelphia Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book J.M.H. 181, page 462.

<sup>7</sup> Garden Club of America, *Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting* (Philadelphia, 1938), 58.

discrimination.”<sup>8</sup> Except for the stone walls and a small fountain, virtually no traces of the gardens remain.

### **Philadelphia and the Colonial Revival Country House**

The Colonial Revival style had its roots in the Centennial Exhibition of 1876, where visitors from around the United States were exposed to Philadelphia’s many eighteenth-century landmarks. With renewed pride in their Colonial heritage, Americans gradually embraced the simplicity and honest use of materials which defined many pre-revolutionary domestic buildings.

In Philadelphia and throughout the United States, the Colonial Revival took many forms. In terms of domestic architecture, the formal Georgian style – influenced by the Palladianism of eighteenth-century Britain and Philadelphia’s own landmarks of the same era – was a common solution. In many cases, however, the Colonial Revival houses built in and around Philadelphia – especially in Germantown and Chestnut Hill, and along the Main Line – were modeled on the less formal, more vernacular forms and materials of the early Pennsylvania farmhouse. These unpretentious dwellings were typically built of locally quarried schist, which was rich in mica and produced long, flat building stones with variegated gray and brown coloring. This distinctive building material gave the Philadelphia region’s early houses a strong local character, which, as the architect Joseph Linden Heacock wrote in 1915, became “an invaluable source of inspiration for our modern work.”<sup>9</sup>

The revival of local building traditions after 1900 was primarily driven by Philadelphians’ preoccupation with historical continuity. In building homes modeled on those of their ancestors, Philadelphians maintained connections to a past of which they were especially proud, as the architectural historian William B. Rhoads has argued.<sup>10</sup> Along the same lines, the early Pennsylvania farmhouse, through its informal massing and honest use of materials, offered tradition-bound Philadelphians an escape from the cycle of passing architectural trends. Perhaps no one captured the appeal of this local form of domestic building as eloquently as Charles Matlack Price, the well-known critic. Writing in *Architectural Record* in 1912, Price framed Philadelphia’s unique version of the Colonial Revival as a logical development in the region’s residential architecture:

In the stylistic kaleidoscope which current architecture in this country treats us to – in the bewildering procession of French Châteaux, Italian Villas, Swiss Châteaux and what not – the eye-weary critic can find solace and pleasure in studying the type of country-house which has lately sprung up around Philadelphia. In such suburbs as Germantown, Ardmore, Cynwyd, Radnor, Wynnewood, St. David’s, Wyndmoor and Merion, and in places lying further out from Philadelphia there has been evolved a type of country house which, quite unlike most American work, is a logical development – a type in which there is more local than borrowed precedent, and in which local materials are frankly expressed in terms of honest craftsmanship. The architects seem not to be ashamed of their materials. There is nothing extraneous, and coming upon a sample of this recent and very happy type of Pennsylvania house, one need not stop to conjecture as to its material. Generally it is stone, and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Linden Heacock, “Ledge-Stone Work of Philadelphia and Vicinity, Part I. Some Historic Examples,” *The Architectural Review*, December 1913, 279. See also E. Sidney Wills, “The Ledge Stone House,” in *The American Architect*, January 21, 1920, 67-68.

<sup>10</sup> William B. Rhoads, *The Colonial Revival* (New York: Garland Publishing 1977), 529-31.



Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

very evidently stone with all the evidences in its treatment that the designer has been imbued with that quality which does more, and always has done more, to produce a saliently sincere architecture than any other – craftsmanship. An architecture that is based on this and on an adherence to the employment of local materials will outlast by centuries the artificial and borrowed finery of another land or another climate.<sup>11</sup>

In the Philadelphia area, the influence of the early Pennsylvania farmhouse on residential design first began to appear in the work of Wilson Eyre, Cope & Stewardson, and George T. Pearson, among other architects, between about 1890 and 1910. In particular, it was Eyre, increasingly guided by Arts and Crafts principles, who embraced the vernacular flavor of the rural Pennsylvania dwelling. Although Eyre's residential work often relied on English models, it also drew heavily on the simple forms and honest craftsmanship of the region's traditional eighteenth-century houses.<sup>12</sup>

Though his work was highly individual, Eyre influenced a generation of younger architects who, between about 1900 and 1930, employed the early Pennsylvania farmhouse more directly as a model in the design of new suburban houses and country estates.<sup>13</sup> Among the most talented and prolific were the firms of Duhring, Okie & Ziegler (especially R. Brognard Okie and Carl A. Ziegler); Brockie & Hastings; Zantzinger, Borie & Medary; Savery, Scheetz & Savery; and Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick. These designers and others excelled in adapting the early Pennsylvania farmhouse type for the Philadelphia suburbs and brought the form into its full maturity. Across Northwest Philadelphia, along the Main Line, and in other nearby suburbs, this group of architects succeeded in making the unpretentious schist house a character-defining feature of the built environment during this period. As illustrated by the examples pictured below, this was, and remains, especially true of Chestnut Hill, Mount Airy, and Germantown where schist was most readily obtainable from local quarries (Figs. 3-6).



**Figure 3** Benjamin Franklin Pepper House at 9100 Crefeld Street, Chestnut Hill (extant). Designed by Brockie & Hastings and built in 1907. Image from the *T-Square Club Annual*, 1911.



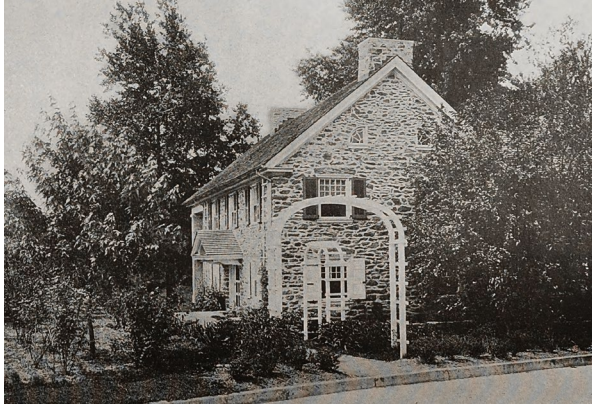
**Figure 4** John S. Jenks, Jr., House, 8711 Seminole Avenue, Chestnut Hill (extant). Designed by Zantzinger & Borie and built in 1908. Image from *American Country Houses of Today*, 1912.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Matlack Price, "The Pennsylvania Type: A Logical Development," *Architectural Record*, October 1912, 308.

<sup>12</sup> Rhoads, 106-107.

<sup>13</sup> Rhoads, 109; Matlack Price, "The Country House in Good Taste: The Achievement of the Philadelphia Architects," in *Arts & Decoration*, October 1925, 43.

Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA



**Figure 5** Sarah R. Watson House, 7703 Lincoln Drive, Chestnut Hill (extant). Designed by Savery, Scheetz & Savery and built in 1909. Image from *Architectural Record*, October 1911.



**Figure 6** Rufus W. Scott House, 6611 Wissahickon Avenue, West Mount Airy (extant). Designed by Duhring, Okie & Ziegler and built in 1913. Image from *The American Architect*, September 29, 1915.

Sugar Loaf Orchard exemplifies the development and maturation of Philadelphia's own Colonial Revival style during the early twentieth century (Fig. 7). Built of schist presumably pulled from a nearby quarry, the Main House, outbuildings, and various stone walls speak to the local building traditions and craftsmanship so prized by architects and their clients across the region at this time. The Main House, though quite large, is unpretentious and friendly. Composed of various informally arranged, gable-roofed volumes, the house effectively captures the vernacular qualities of the early Pennsylvania farmhouse, making it appear at home in the landscape. Some aspects of the house are not traditional; the brick sills, for example, are not a typical feature of the region's eighteenth-century houses. Rather, the architects' use of red brick demonstrates how designers could, and often did, introduce subtle variations for visual and textural effect, even when the overall impression was one of strong adherence to local precedent.



**Figure 7** Pen and watercolor rendering of the Main House at Sugar Loaf Orchard. Artist unknown. Original drawing in possession of the current owner.

Houses like Sugar Loaf Orchard represented a major achievement by Philadelphia architects in American country house design, according to Matlack Price. Writing in *Arts & Architecture* in 1925, Price claimed that “Of all the regional architecture in America the country house architecture in and around Philadelphia has been the most felicitous,” and that “It is safe to say that no part of this country possessing a definite Colonial tradition has been so consistent or so successful in recreating houses in this tradition than the vicinity of Philadelphia.”<sup>14</sup> This legacy remains today a character-defining feature of the built environment in Northwest Philadelphia and the near suburbs.

### **Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick, Architects**

Sugar Loaf Orchard was designed both by the firm of Martin & Kirkpatrick and the firm that succeeded it, Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick. This partnership, first established by the architects Sydney E. Martin and Donald M. Kirkpatrick in Philadelphia in 1912, expanded with the addition of Walter H. Thomas in 1919.

Walter Horstmann Thomas (1876-1948) was born in Philadelphia and studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, earning a B.S. degree in 1899. After briefly working for architect Edgar V. Seeler, Thomas went to Paris in 1902 to study architecture at the École des Beaux Arts. On his return to Philadelphia in 1905, Thomas established an office with C. Wharton Churchman. Thomas and Churchman were joined by John Molitor in 1907, at which point the partnership was renamed Thomas, Churchman & Molitor. This firm, which designed numerous private homes as well as churches and hospital buildings, lasted until about 1914. That year, Thomas began to practice independently, not joining Martin and Kirkpatrick, who both worked under Thomas for a brief period earlier in the decade, until 1919.<sup>15</sup>

Sydney Errington Martin (1883-1970) was born in Philadelphia and educated at the Central Manual Training School, from which he graduated in 1902. Martin then went on to study architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, graduating with a B.S. degree in 1908. After Penn, Martin entered the office of Thomas, Churchman & Molitor where he remained for about two years before leaving to spend a year in Europe. On his return to Philadelphia in 1911, Martin briefly worked for Day & Klauder, leaving to establish his own firm with Donald M. Kirkpatrick, whom he had met while working for Thomas, Churchman & Molitor, in 1912.<sup>16</sup>

Donald Morris Kirkpatrick (1887-1966) was born in Easton, Pennsylvania. After earning a bachelor’s degree from Lafayette College in 1908, Kirkpatrick moved to Philadelphia to study architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, earning a B.S. degree in 1911. During a brief apprenticeship in the office of Thomas, Churchman & Molitor, Kirkpatrick met another young architect, Sydney Martin. The pair established the firm of Martin & Kirkpatrick in 1912. Soon after the practice was up and running, however, Kirkpatrick won the prestigious Paris Prize for 1912, allowing him to enroll at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. Kirkpatrick remained in France for two years and resumed his partnership with Martin upon his return to Philadelphia in 1914.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Price, “The Country House in Good Taste,” 43-44.

<sup>15</sup> Tatman, Sandra L. and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983), 783-85.

<sup>16</sup> Tatman and Moss, 508-09.

<sup>17</sup> Tatman and Moss, 448-49.

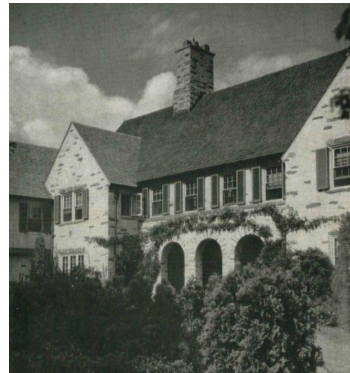


Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

Martin & Kirkpatrick, and later Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick, were prolific residential designers. Between 1914 and 1931, when Kirkpatrick departed, the firm completed nearly forty commissions for suburban houses and country estates throughout the Philadelphia region, especially along the Main Line, across Northwest Philadelphia, and in the near northern suburbs of Jenkintown and Rydal. Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick's fluency in country house design was widely acknowledged in the architectural press. During the 1910s and 1920s, many of the firm's residential projects – most designed in the Colonial Revival or English Cotswold styles – were prominently featured in the pages of *Architectural Record*, *The American Architect*, and *House & Garden*, among other national periodicals. The houses of Henry Edson in Ardmore (1914; extant) and Ellis Ames Ballard in Lafayette Hill (1926; extant) are just two examples, both showing how the early Pennsylvania farmhouse, in particular, influenced Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick's residential practice (Figs. 8 and 9). Others were never published but still demonstrate how effectively Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick adapted the early Pennsylvania farmhouse for the modern suburbs. Among this group are several modest, speculatively built houses on Jericho Road in Jenkintown (1922; all extant), which typified the firm's work across multiple planned suburban communities (Fig. 10). Along with the Gilpins' Sugar Loaf Orchard these houses and many others illustrate the significant role Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick played in developing this distinctively local form of the Colonial Revival during the early twentieth century.



**Figure 8** Henry Edson House in Ardmore, PA, designed by Martin & Kirkpatrick and built in 1914. Extant. Image from *House & Garden*, March 17, 1917.



**Figure 9** Ellis Ames Ballard House in Lafayette Hill, PA, designed by Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick and built in 1926. Extant. Image from *Architectural Record*, June 1930.



**Figure 10** House on Jericho Road in Jenkintown, PA, designed by Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick and built in 1922. Extant. Image from the W. & M. Herkness Collection at Penn State University.

Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

Despite a steady flow of residential commissions, Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick proved their versatility as architectural designers through a diverse array of other projects. The firm became especially proficient in the design of large hotels, of which they completed at least a dozen throughout the United States. The most prominent of their hotel commissions was arguably the Georgian Revival-style Hotel Viking in Newport, Rhode Island (1925-26; extant), which remains in operation today (Fig. 11).



**Figure 11** Early postcard view of the Hotel Viking in Newport, Rhode Island, designed by Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick and built in 1925-26. Extant.

But while the firm attracted clients from across the country, their influence on the built environment is felt especially in the Philadelphia region. The Germantown Y.M.C.A. at 5722-38 Greene Street (1927-28; extant), for example, represents Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick's recognized expertise in the area of recreational and institutional buildings, of which they designed many within and surrounding the city (Fig. 12).



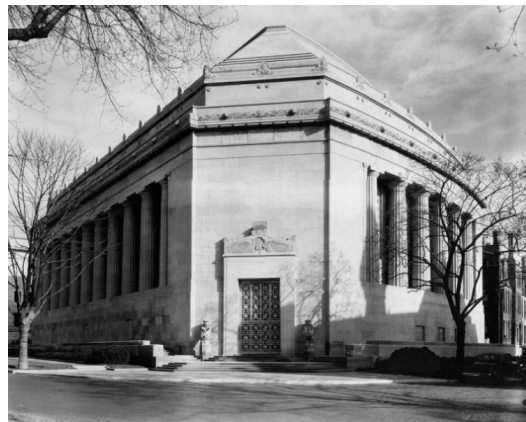
**Figure 12** Germantown Y.M.C.A. at 5722-38 Greene Street in Philadelphia, designed by Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick and built in 1927-28. Extant. Image from the 1990 National Register of Historic Places Nomination.

Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places  
29 and 31 W. Bells Mill Road, Philadelphia, PA

While most of these projects reflected the firm's skills in adapting the eighteenth-century Georgian style for modern building types, Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick also frequently demonstrated their proficiency in a variety of other stylistic idioms. In Philadelphia, the firm's work in the Collegiate Gothic style, which included dormitories at several universities, is best represented by their Christian Association Building at the University of Pennsylvania (1927; extant), now known as the ARCH Building (Fig. 13). Additionally, Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick's Beaux-Arts effectively demonstrated their Beaux Arts training in their winning competition entry for the Girard College Chapel (1931-33; extant), which is among their best-known projects (Fig. 14). Finally, when called for the firm also proved their ability to create striking architecture even when the program demanded a more functional approach, as in their steam plant at the University of Pennsylvania (1924-25; extant), now known as the Hollenback Center (Fig. 15). Because so much of their work in Philadelphia remains standing, Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick's influence on the development of the city's built environment during the early twentieth century is still felt today.



**Figure 13** Christian Association Building at the University of Pennsylvania, designed by Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick and built in 1927. Extant. Image from the University of Pennsylvania Archives.



**Figure 14** Girard College Chapel, designed by Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick and built in 1931-33. Extant. Image from the James L. Dillon Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.



**Figure 15** University of Pennsylvania Steam Plant, designed by Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick and built in 1924-25. Extant. Image from the *AIA/T-Square Club Annual*, 1925.



**Later Use of Sugar Loaf Orchard**

After John C. Gilpin died in 1963, his wife Lucy continued to live at Sugar Loaf Orchard until about 1970. That year, the property was given a new principal use as a conference center.<sup>18</sup> This new institutional use, which was likely related to Temple University's Sugarloaf Conference Center, appears to have encompassed the entirety of the approximately 6,700-square foot Main House.

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<sup>18</sup> Department of Licenses and Inspections, City of Philadelphia, Building Permit #58636 (1970) is referenced in the inventory of the Chestnut Hill Historic District, a National Register of Historic Places district which was listed in 1985 (NRHP Ref. No. 85001334). A building permit abstract is available in the archives of the Chestnut Hill Conservancy.

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