



# **POPLAR HALL LOCAL LANDMARK REPORT**

409 Sunset Drive  
Greensboro, North Carolina 27408

**Application for Guilford County Local Landmark Designation**  
Prepared by Gate City Preservation L.L.C.  
April 2022



Guilford County Planning & Development Department  
**Guilford County  
Historic Preservation Commission**

**HISTORIC NAME(S) OF PROPERTY**

Poplar Hall  
Aubrey L. Brooks House

**ADDRESS OF PROPERTY**

409 Sunset Drive, Greensboro, North Carolina 27408 (current parcel for house)  
411 Sunset Drive, Greensboro, North Carolina 27408 (now an adjacent vacant parcel)

**PIN #** 7865-44-8432 and #7865-44-6522

**DEED BOOK & PAGE** Book 6846- Page 2746 and Book 6946-Page 149

**PLAT BOOK AND PAGE** #173-31

**ZONING** R-3

Amount of land/acreage to be designated  
3.94 acres

Interior to be designated  
☒ Yes ☐ No

**Property Owner's Address & Phone:**

Helen Brooks  
409 Sunset Drive  
Greensboro, North Carolina 27408

**E-mail**

[helenebrooks55@gmail.com](mailto:helenebrooks55@gmail.com)

**Applicant's Address & Phone:**

Gate City Preservation L.L.C.  
211 Tate Street  
Greensboro, North Carolina 27403

**E-mail**

[samantha@gatecitypreservation.com](mailto:samantha@gatecitypreservation.com)

The application is due no later than twelve noon (12 noon) on the **last** Tuesday of the month, 21 days before the regularly scheduled meeting held on every third (3<sup>rd</sup>) Tuesday of the month. Please address to:

**Guilford County Planning Department  
ATTN: Historic Preservation Commission  
PO Box 3427  
Greensboro, NC 27402**

**READ CAREFULLY AND SUPPLY ALL INFORMATION**

**The following information must be supplied in a *report format* before the application can be reviewed, deemed complete and placed on the agenda. Please attach additional sheets or a research report. (A minimum of eleven (11) reports are required)**

1. **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:** In order to recommend designation of a landmark, the property must be deemed historically, architecturally or archaeologically significant. Please provide a brief statement explaining why this property should be a designated landmark. See examples on page 3. *Copies from JW Jones and Sumners*
2. **MAPS:** Provide a scaled plot plan of the property showing lot lines and location of all buildings. Indicate the area and building(s) to be designated as a landmark.
3. **ARCHITECTURAL:** Describe the original and current appearance of the significant structures such as houses, barns, well houses, and other buildings to be designated, includes photos or illustrations. The description should include the following: date of construction; date(s) of alterations, description of overall form, and exterior and interior details. Include a drawing of the existing and original (if different) floor plan with rooms labeled. *Example from Sumners House.*
4. **HISTORICAL:** Tell the history of the property. The details should include the following: uses of the property, photos (or copies); list of owners (from Grantor-Grantee index), a detailed description of builders or architects if known. Also, attach and *describe* newspaper articles, excerpts from books, cemetery records, deeds, oral histories etc. Any additional information, literature, illustrations, newspaper articles or other media that you feel will contribute to the application can be submitted but become property of the Commission. List research sources as a bibliography.
5. **PHOTOGRAPHS:** *Please submit a complete photographic record of the property in each report. In addition to prints, all photographs shall be submitted on a CD-R in TIF or JPG format*
6. *Bibliographies, footnotes and chain of title are necessary to be considered a complete report.*

## I. Abstract

### *Statement of Significance*

Poplar Hall, designed by Hartford, Connecticut architect A. Raymond Ellis, was one of the earliest residences in Irving Park. Built for the family of Aubrey Lee Brooks, a lawyer, politician, author, and general counsel for the Jefferson Standard Life Insurance Company, the house was designed as a grand, brick Neoclassical Revival with monumental massing and six, two-level ionic fluted columns spanning the facade. Brooks and his wife, Helen Higbie Brooks, built the house ca. 1914, naming it Poplar Hall after a substantial tulip poplar that originally stood in the front yard.<sup>1</sup> Poplar Hall is architecturally significant because it is an exceptional example of Neoclassical Revival architecture in Guilford County. The home was featured in the March 1915 issue of *Architecture Magazine*. Moreover, interior design updates by Greensboro's Otto Zenke in the 1970s add another layer of historical significance to the home. Along with its architectural significance, Poplar Hall tells the story of three generations of Brooks' who have lived in the house. The house is also representative of the early development of Irving Park as a thriving community in northwest Greensboro. The period of significance for the home is the building's ca. 1914 construction date.

### *Archaeological Comments*

No known archaeological features are present at this time.

### *Integrity Statement*

- **Location:** Poplar Hall remains in its original location.
- **Design:** The grand, monumental, Neoclassical Revival architecture of Poplar Hall makes it one of the best examples in the county. The current property owners have taken great care to preserve the design features that make the home exemplary.
- **Setting:** The Irving Park residential setting has remained largely unchanged. The property owners would like to include an adjacent parcel that they own (411 Sunset Drive) in order to continue to preserve the setting of Poplar Hall. Many homes and features from the period of significance are still extant. The nearby Thornton-Brooks House, a Guilford County Local Landmark with historical ties to the Brooks family of Poplar Hall, is located next door.
- **Workmanship:** The skillful workmanship of the original builders and the workmanship of other craftsmen and restoration specialists who have worked on the home over the years has been carefully and thoughtfully undertaken to preserve the home's architectural details and features. Great care was taken to properly restore the home by Charles Ronald Yow of North Carolina Historic Restoration and Preservation, Inc. Because of his careful work, architectural features like the home's monumental front columns have been preserved.
- **Materials:** Many of the original materials and finishings of the home have been preserved or restored. From the original wood windows, doors, shutters, built-ins, moldings, grand stairways, and floors, to the original exterior brickwork, the home has retained a high level of integrity.
- **Feeling:** Due to the great care taken by property owners over the years, all descendants of the original Brooks family who built Poplar Hall, the home's feeling has been retained. The connection to the Brooks family and their history is unbroken as is the architectural ties to architects A. Raymond Ellis and Otto Zenke.
- **Association:** The home is still utilized as a single family residence and is owned by the granddaughter of Aubrey and Helen Brooks.

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<sup>1</sup> Aubrey L. Brooks, *A Southern Lawyer: Fifty Years at the Bar* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 93.



## ***Proposed Boundary Justification***

The proposed boundary for Local Landmark Designation is the property's current 3.06 acre parcel (PIN: 7865448432) and the adjacent lot's .88 acre parcel (PIN: 7865446522). Both are owned by the property owner. Protecting the adjacent parcel as part of this local landmark designation will help to preserve and protect the integrity of this important historical resource.

## **II. Maps and Floor Plans**

### *Guilford County Tax Map Showing Parcels for 409 and 411 Sunset Drive*

Search Results (1 Parcels) ×

More Clear

[CAMA Report](#) [Community Info](#)  
[Well and Septic](#) [Neighborhood Sales](#)  
[Parcel Verify](#) [Tax Appraisal Information](#)  
[Tax Bill](#) [Oblique Photos](#)

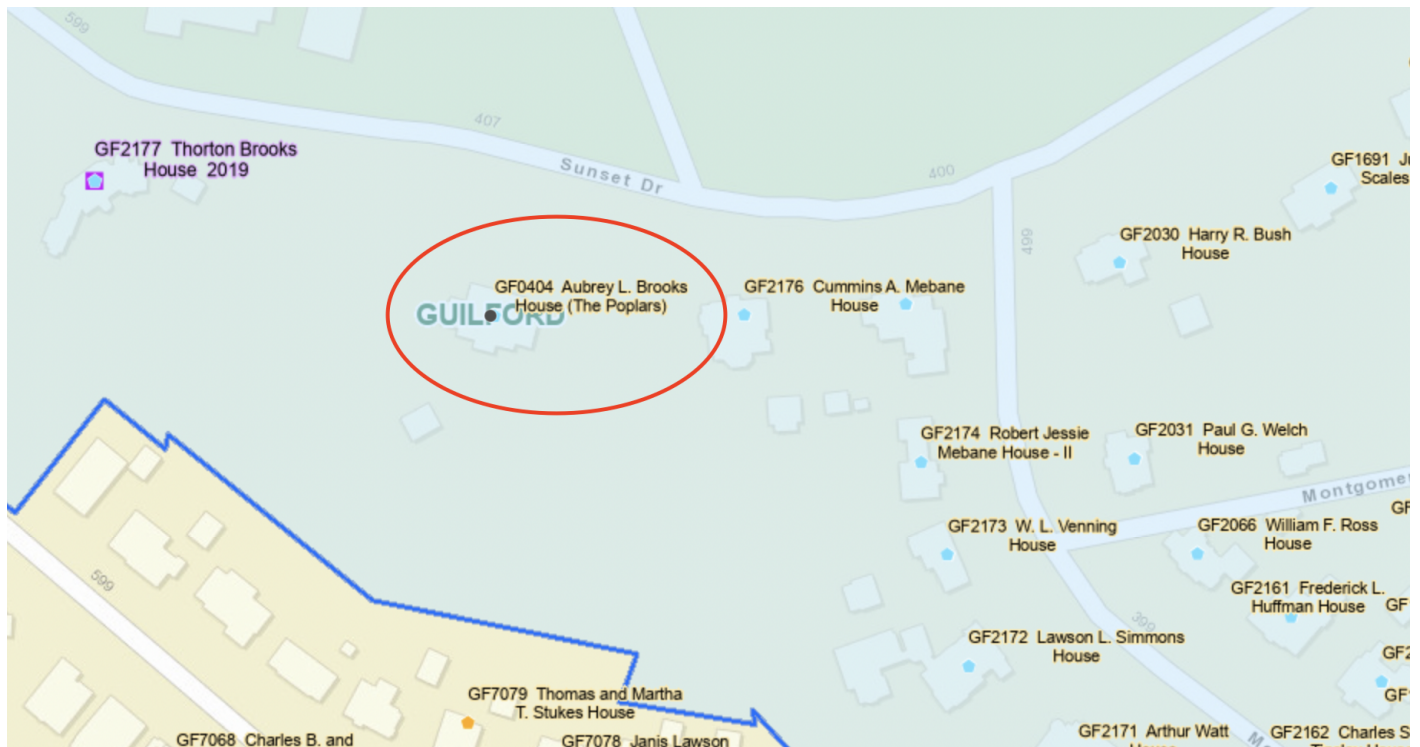
Parcel Number	7045
PIN	7865448432
Owner	BROOKS, HELEN E
Owner History	<a href="#">Card Image</a>
Mail Address	409 SUNSET DR
Mail City	GREENSBORO
Mail State	NC
Mail Zip	24708
Property Address	409 SUNSET DR
Legal Description	POPLAR HALL @ OLD IRVING PARK L02 PL173-31
Deed	<a href="#">006846-02746</a>
Plat	<a href="#">173-31</a>
Condo	

### *Aerial Map*

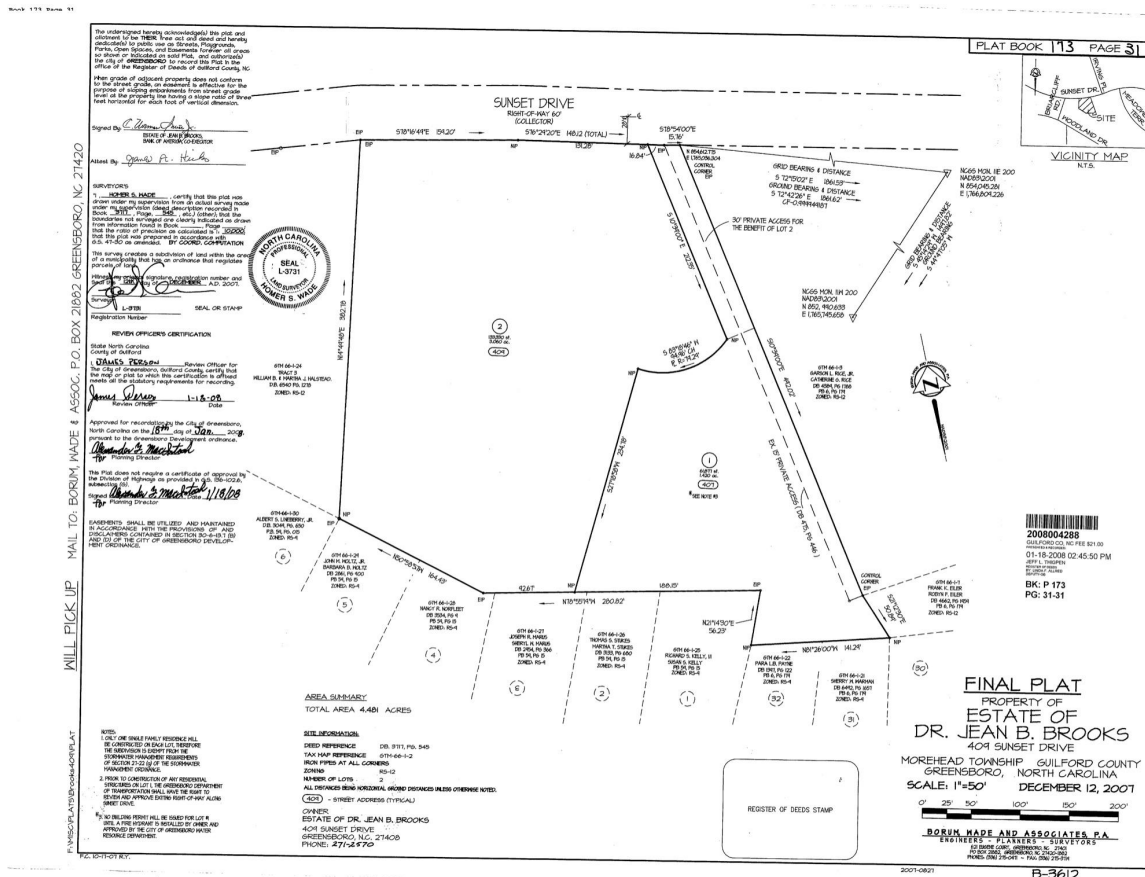




# HPOWeb Map



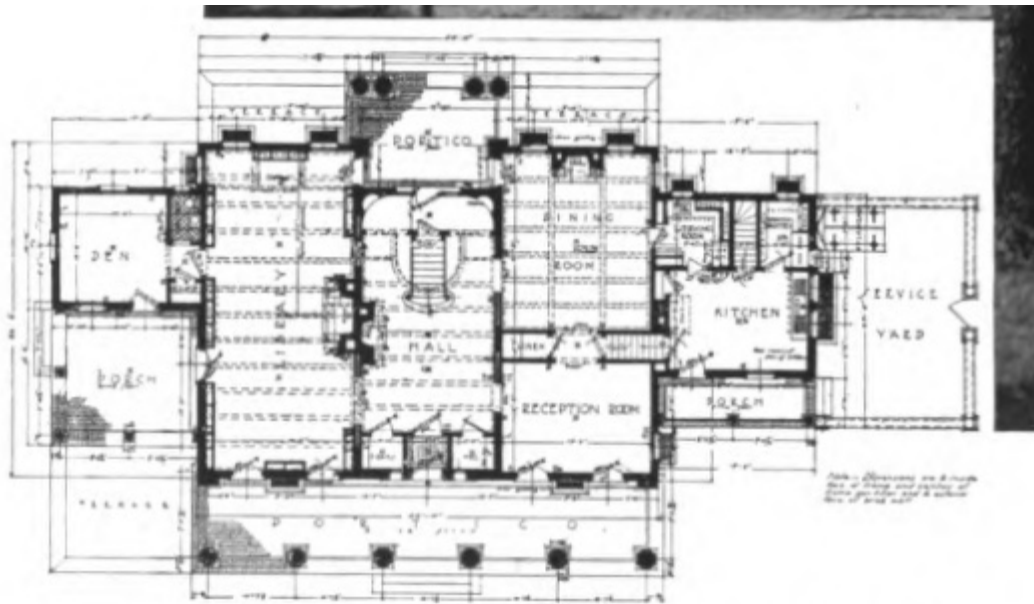
## Plat Map, 2007





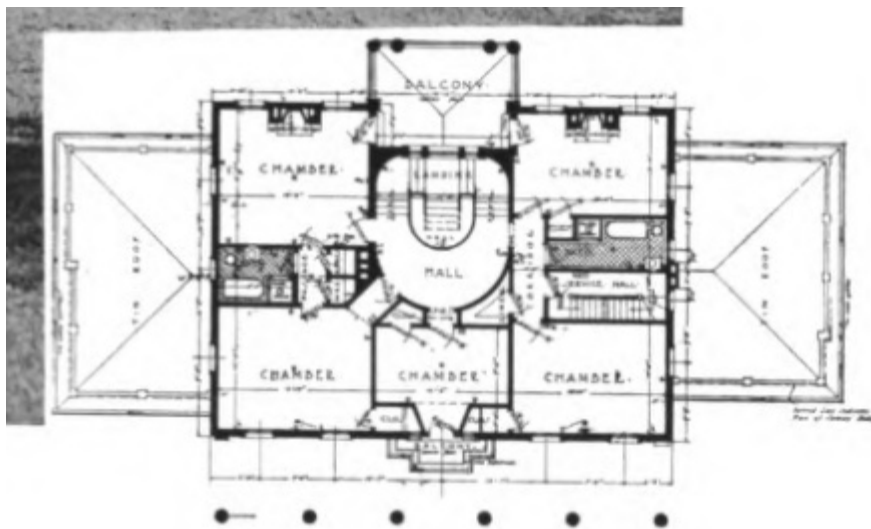
## Architectural Drawings

### First Level



HOUSE, A. L. BROOKS, GREENSBORO, N. C.

### Second Level

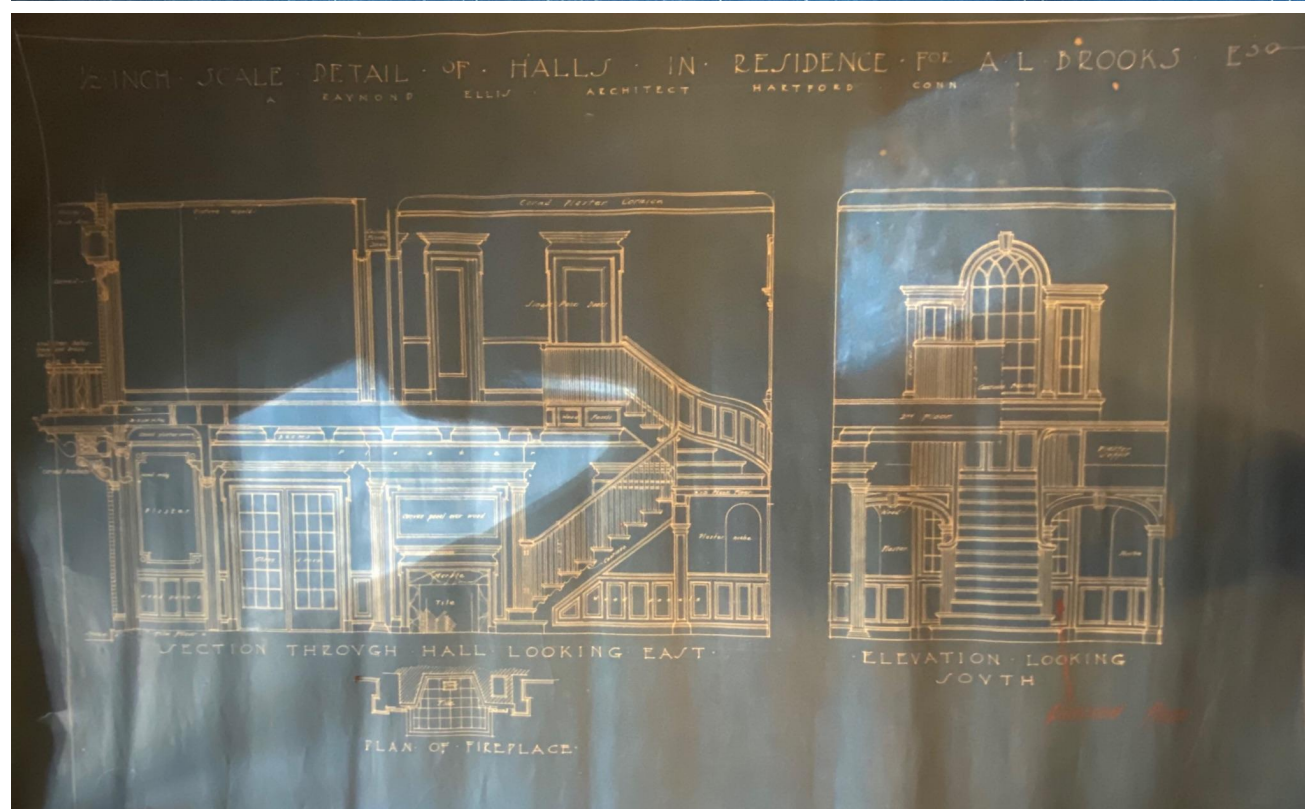


A. RAYMOND ELLIS, ARCHITECT.

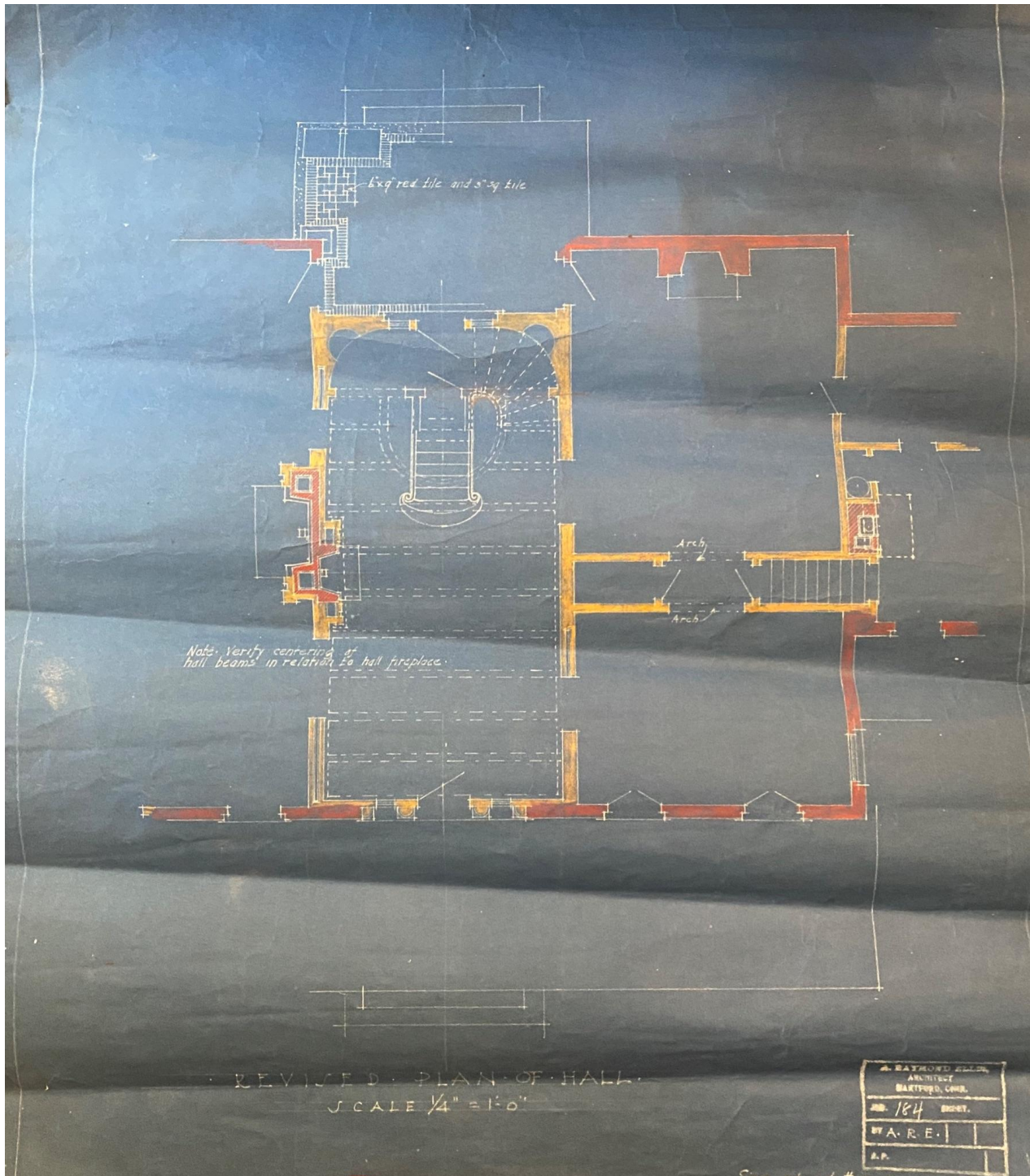


RESIDENCE FOR A. L. BROOKS.  
A. RAYMOND ELLIS ARCHITECT.  
HARTFORD CONN.

The drawing shows a section of a building facade. At the top, two spherical ornaments, each on a small pedestal, are positioned on a horizontal line. A handwritten note 'Doris' with an arrow points to the left ornament. Below this line is a thick horizontal band. Underneath the band is a large, arched window or opening, flanked by vertical lines. The drawing is executed in white lines on a dark blue background.







### III. Architectural Assessment

#### *Architectural Importance*

Poplar Hall is locally significant because it is one of the finest examples of Neoclassical Revival residential architecture in Guilford County. Notably, a photograph of the facade along with its plans were featured in the March 1915 issue of *Architecture* magazine, Volumes 31 and 32 (Appendix 1). The monumental design features grand fluted columns on the facade and rear elevations, one of the only Neoclassical Revival homes in the county to do so.<sup>2</sup> The expertly laid brickwork, which incorporates a decorative pattern of soldiers and headers with cast concrete keystones over the French doors and window lintels on the facade, the intricate exterior and interior woodwork, the careful selection of high quality materials, and the unique curvilinear design of the second level landing exhibit a high level of craftsmanship (Appendix 6 and Appendix 11n). Furthermore, the property has retained a high level of integrity and has remained in the Brooks family since the home's ca. 1914 construction. Located in its original setting with contributing landscape features and other historic resources from the period of significance, the home exudes a sense of place. Updates to the interior, designed by Greensboro interior designer Otto Zenke in the 1970s, contribute to the home's architectural significance.

#### *Architectural Context*

In her book *North Carolina Architecture*, Catherine Bishir argues that the rise in power of the Democratic Party at the turn of the twentieth century, which resulted in increased state and local government spending, was a direct influence in the rapid growth of many North Carolina cities.<sup>3</sup> As wealth grew, North Carolinians and other Americans were exposed to evocative architectural styles coming out of the City Beautiful movement and the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. One of the most popular styles to emerge from the exposition was Classical Revival, a style that heavily influenced architecture in Irving Park.

Architect A. Raymond Ellis designed two Neoclassical Revival homes in Greensboro, the first was Poplar Hall and the second was the W. A. Hewitt House in Fisher Park, also built ca. 1914. Poplar Hall is a grander design with two full-height porticos, one at the rear and one on the facade. The portico on the facade, with its six ionic columns, runs the full width and height of the main block, unlike the Hewitt House which has a full-height, pedimented entry porch over the central bay alone. According to Virginia McAlester, the full-facade porch subtype of the Neoclassical Revival became popular from 1925 to 1950, making Ellis' design ahead of its time.<sup>4</sup> Ellis' full facade portico pays homage to George Washington's home, Mount Vernon, which, as Aubrey Brooks explains in his memoir, was the inspiration for his own home's design, "In youth I had looked with admiration at the stately antebellum Georgian mansions in Virginia and North Carolina, and wistfully longed that I might some day own one. My ideal was Mount Vernon."<sup>5</sup>

Fluted columns with ionic capitals are common in these early revival styles, and were usually made possible by the introduction of mass-produced capitals of molded plaster or composition materials. The capitals of Poplar Hall are unique, however, because they were made of terracotta. The ornate columns of Poplar Hall

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<sup>2</sup> Marvin Brown, *Greensboro: An Architectural Record: A survey of the historic and architecturally significant structures of Greensboro, North Carolina* (North Carolina: Preservation Greensboro, Inc., 1995), 315.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine W. Bishir, *North Carolina Architecture*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 428-429.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses. The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 435.

<sup>5</sup> Aubrey L. Brooks, *A Southern Lawyer: Fifty Years at the Bar* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 93.

stand in stark contrast to the Hewitt House's unfluted columns with lack of capitals.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Poplar Hall has a hipped roof, a form that was most popular from 1900 to 1920. Side-gabled roofs, like the one on the Hewitt House, became popular circa 1925 to the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> Ellis set this home apart from other Classical Revivals by designing full-height porticos for the front and rear facades, not seen in any other Guilford County home of its time.<sup>8</sup>

## ***Architectural Description***

### ***Setting***

Poplar Hall is located in Guilford County, North Carolina in northwest Greensboro (Fig. 1). The house is a contributing building in the Irving Park National Register Historic District, a picturesque, planned suburb that was developed in the early twentieth century as "Greensboro's ultimate park community," with its planned roadways and greenspaces, Irving Park was specifically designed to be separate from other, lower-class Greensboro neighborhoods.<sup>9</sup> The neighborhood entrance is marked by "ceremonial stone portals" at the intersection of Sunset Drive and North Elm Street, with a tree-lined boulevard, the first block of Sunset Drive, leading into the neighborhood.<sup>10</sup> Curvilinear streets and natural features play an important role in Irving Park's forested setting, including "rolling hills, woodlands, and a collection of small streams which feed into Buffalo Creek."<sup>11</sup> Many of these important landscape features are found on the Poplar Hall property. Situated on one of the largest lots in Irving Park, directly across from the Greensboro Country Club and golf course, south of Sunset Drive, east of Briarcliff Road, and west of Meadowbrook Terrace, stands Poplar Hall with its expansive front yard and gardens.

### ***Front (North) Elevation***

The five-bay-wide main block of the front (north) elevation of Poplar Hall is constructed of running bond brick and is two levels high (Fig. 2). The finished attic, where Minnie and John Perry (the cook and chauffeur) lived, is under a hipped shingled roof, with three rounded dormer windows, on a full-width roof deck with decorative balustrade. Six two-level, ionic, fluted columns with painted terracotta capitals span the full width and height of the main block (Fig. 7a). A decorative, molded cornice with modillions and a deep overhanging eave adds striking depth and character to the Neoclassical facade. The first level of the symmetrical facade, from east to west, is comprised of a two-level, inset, fluted pilaster; two sets of 10-light french doors with full length, paneled shutters with cut-out f-holes; a highly decorative front door surround with brackets, dental molding, inset fluted columns, sidelights, and transom windows; another matching set of french doors; and another two-level, inset, fluted pilaster (Fig. 8 and Fig. 9a). French doors and window lintels on the first and second levels of the facade are highlighted by a decorative pattern of soldiers and headers with a cast concrete decorative keystone. The deep eave of the front door surround accommodates the deck of the second-level portico (Fig. 10a).

The second level of the facade, like the first, is highly symmetrical, with a two-level, inset, fluted pilaster, two six-over-one wood windows with green louvered shutters with cut-out f-holes; a second level portico

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<sup>6</sup> McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 436.

<sup>7</sup> McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 438.

<sup>8</sup> Marvin Brown, *Greensboro: An Architectural Record*, 315.

<sup>9</sup> Laura A.W. Phillips, "Irving Park Historic District," section 7, page 1.

<sup>10</sup> Phillips, "Irving Park Historic District," section 7, page 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*



with an antique bronze balustrade, rounded molded door surround, and sidelights; followed by two six-over-one wood windows and another two-level, inset, fluted pilaster.

Side wings on the east and west of the main block were added by 1924 to accommodate sleeping porches on the second level. The open porches on the first level were redesigned and enclosed by Otto Zenke in the 1970s to add a sunroom and expand the kitchen. The east wing has large, ten-light double windows with transoms and fluted, doric columns with a molded cornice.

The second level of the wing is inset, allowing for an open deck with decorative balustrade, matching the full-width roof deck. The sleeping porch is designed with large, 10-light windows, inset squared pilasters, and a molded cornice. The west wing has a similar configuration and design. The first level of the west wing, accommodating the kitchen expansion, consists of two, 12-light windows and inset, fluted, doric columns. Like the other wing, there is a matching, thick, molded cornice and roof-deck with balustrade. The second level sleeping porch on the west wing is identical to the east wing.

### *Side (East) Elevation*

The first level of the side (east) elevation of Poplar Hall is part of the east wing (Fig. 3). From south to north, this elevation is comprised of a six-over-one window with matching shutters and keystone lintel design matching the facade; followed by a set of 10-light french doors with sidelights and transoms; followed by windows that match the configuration of the french doors. Like the north elevation of this wing, the east elevation has inset, fluted, doric pilasters and a thick molded cornice.

The second level of the east elevation is similar to the north elevation of this wing, with three sets of eight-light windows surrounded by inset squared pilasters. The roof deck with balustrade is visible from this elevation. On the main block, south of the east wing on the first level, there is a six over-one window, identical to the others. To the north of the east block on the second level there is another six-over-one window overlooking the roof deck above the sunroom.

### *Side (West) Elevation*

The first level of the side (west) elevation, from north to south, is comprised of a six-over-one window; two fluted pilasters surrounding a six-light window in the kitchen expansion; a six-light paneled rear door with steps leading from the kitchen to the side courtyard; and two six-over-one windows. The next bay is an enclosed stair to the basement, covered in weatherboard with a pedimented eave on front-facing gable and a 12-light door with a louvered screen door (Fig. 4). The second level of this elevation is comprised of the roof deck with balustrade outside the second level sleeping porch with three sets of three, eight-light windows surrounded by squared, inset pilasters.

### *Rear (South) Elevation*

The rear (south) elevation is nearly as, if not more, elaborate than the facade (Fig. 5). A massive, pedimented, two-level, di-style, central portico with two sets of two ionic fluted columns and inset fluted pilasters dominates this elevation (Fig. 7b). The portico has massive modillions in its molded eaves. A five-light fan window is in the center of the massive pedimented gable (Fig. 9b). Today, the upper and lower porches have been screened in. The first level of the rear (south) elevation from west to east begins with the enclosed basement stair. Four sets of six-over-one windows with shutters, identical to the north elevation

follow. Under the massive, central portico, there is a 15-light side door leading to the dining room, a rear ten-light door with paneled six-light side lights, and a matching 15-light side door leading to the library (Fig. 10b). Following the central portico, there are two two more six-over-one windows on the main block followed by a slender four-over-one window and traditional six-over-one window on the south elevation of the east wing.

The second level of this elevation, from west to east, is comprised of two sets of three, eight-light windows for the sleeping porch; two six-over-one windows identical to the others; the central portico, another set of two six over one windows; a single six-over-six window; and another set of three, eight-light windows for the sleeping porch on the east wing. The two corbeled chimneys at the rear of the house are visible from this elevation.

### *Interior*

The property owner wishes to designate both the interior and exterior of the home. The interior architecture of Poplar Hall is exceedingly high integrity and high style. The entrance from the front door opens up to a main foyer with rich, wood flooring, full-height, classical style mantels with dentil moldings and inset fluted pilasters, paneled chair molding, highly stylized door surrounds, molded ceiling beams, and rounded archways contribute to the Neoclassical style of the home (Fig. 11a-b). At the rear of the hall, an elegant curvilinear stair with rounded newels lead to the second level.

The library boasts dark rich wood floors, ceiling beams, a full-height mantle, window and door surrounds, and built-in bookshelves (Fig. 11c). In his memoir, Aubrey Brooks shares, “Through the years we have accumulated a large library, which is a constant source of pleasure.”<sup>12</sup> Dark wood is complemented by brown marble in the fireplace surround.

Like the main foyer and library, the dining room has ceiling beams, and decorative door and window surrounds (Fig. 11f). Paneled wainscotting in the dining room complements the other molding in the room. The deep, rich, wood floors are carried over into the dining room.

The “reception room,” as it is labeled on the original floor plans, has a large arched entryway from the dining room (Fig. 11g). Architectural details from the other rooms are carried over to this space as well, including the decorative door and window surrounds and floors.

The kitchen, expanded by Otto Zenke in the early 1970s, has massive, north-facing windows that give the illusion that the space is still open-air (Fig. 11h). A service stair in the kitchen leads up to the second story and the finished attic apartment (Fig. 11i).

The landing of the second level of the home is designed in a unique, curvilinear pattern. To accommodate this shape, one of the bedroom doors is also curved (Fig. 11n). The second level of the home accommodates several bedrooms, bathrooms, and sleeping porches (Fig. 11j-m; 11p-r). There are also two balconies on the second level, one on the facade (north elevation) and one of the rear (south elevation).

The house has a finished basement that spans the entire length of the main block.

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<sup>12</sup> Aubrey L. Brooks, *A Southern Lawyer: Fifty Years at the Bar* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 93.

## IV. Historical

### *Architects and Designers*

Connecticut architect A. Raymond Ellis designed the Brooks' Neoclassical Revival Mansion, which was built circa 1913-1914. The home was featured in the March 1915 issue of *Architecture Magazine*. The builders of the house were Longest and Tessier.<sup>13</sup> Ellis was also the architect of the H.R. Bush house on Sunset Drive, which was built between 1912-1913, a Colonial Revival.<sup>14</sup> Raymond also designed a Neoclassical Revival for William A.J. and Jessie Hewitt in Fisher Park in 1914.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, Raymond's skill was in demand for the wealthy residents of Greensboro and beyond.

A. Raymond Ellis's architectural firm was set in Hartford, Connecticut. He was born in Nova Scotia and trained at MIT.<sup>16</sup> In Connecticut's Prospect Avenue Historic District, he designed 21 house commissions.<sup>17</sup> His architectural designs ranged from Colonial Revival, Neoclassical Revival, Georgian Revival, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Tudor Revivals with Craftsman influences.<sup>18</sup> The National Register nomination for Prospect Avenue Historic District proposes Ellis "participated in the Red Cross-financed reconstruction in France."<sup>19</sup> Although further evidence of this work was not found, Ellis did write an article titled "Housing as a war problem" for *American Architect* on August 14, 1918.<sup>20</sup>

Ellis is known for his articles and house plans published in several issues of the *Women's Home Companion* magazine from the 1910s to the 1930s. In a February 1914 article "What Is the Ideal Small House" he discussed the variation of costs of building similar style houses based on region; in Massachusetts \$5,500, in Connecticut \$8,000, and in North Carolina \$4,000. Of course, the homes in Irving Park are not small houses, and there was a covenant that demanded "no dwelling house shall be constructed or maintained on the premises of less value than (\$5,000.00) Five Thousand Dollars."<sup>21</sup> Ellis's published house plan designs follow a common architectural practice of this time period—using print magazines to feature and sell your designs. By the 1930s, Ellis is quoted in the *Hartford Daily Courant* on how to build small Colonial Revival houses economically.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, the Brooks' Neoclassical Revival Mansion is a rarer example of a grand home in Ellis' portfolio of smaller Revival Style homes.

Otto Zenke was a Greensboro-based, but nationally and internationally known interior designer. Zenke gained his education at the Pratt Institute and Parsons School of Design in New York City, then in 1937 relocated to Greensboro, North Carolina. He was attracted to Greensboro by an opportunity to institute a design service for a local furniture store. As his career developed, he specialized in "residential work, and the

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<sup>13</sup> "Irving Park News, Vol. 1 No. 289," *Greensboro Daily News*, December 24, 1916.

<sup>14</sup> "Irving Park News, Vol. I, No. 240, 'Overcrowding Impossible,'" December 31, 1916.

<sup>15</sup> "Hartford CT Architect Designed Grand Hewitt House," Preservation Greensboro, accessed 4/24/2022, <https://preservationgreensboro.org/preservation-greensboros-2011-tour-of-historic-homes-hewitt-house/>.

<sup>16</sup> Walter Woodward, *Looking for information on A. Raymond Ellis, Hartford architect*, H-Connecticut, 11-17-2014, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/2923/discussions/52516/looking-information-raymond-ellis-hartford-architect>.

<sup>17</sup> "Prospect Avenue Historic District," livingplaces.com, accessed 4-24-2022, [https://www.livingplaces.com/CT/Hartford\\_County/Hartford\\_City/Prospect\\_Avenue\\_Historic\\_District.html](https://www.livingplaces.com/CT/Hartford_County/Hartford_City/Prospect_Avenue_Historic_District.html).

<sup>18</sup> Prospect Avenue National Historic District National Register August 25, 1985.

<sup>19</sup> Prospect Avenue National Historic District National Register August 25, 1985, Item number 8, page 1.

<sup>20</sup> A. Raymond Ellis, "Housing as a war problem," *American Architect*, August 14, 1918, pages 190-197.

<sup>21</sup> Guilford County Deed Book 377 Page 417.

<sup>22</sup> "Dutch Colonial House Holds Its Popularity," *Hartford Courant*, August 20, 1933.

charm and dignity and quality of the homes he has planned for people in and around Greensboro have undoubtedly enhanced life in that city for an enormous number of people.”<sup>23</sup> In an article lauding the designer posthumously, Zenke’s 34-year legacy in Greensboro is clearly important: “‘Zenke’ was the name people loved to drop. It stood for class and the very best in furnishings. In Irving Park homes, the name of the interior designer almost went without saying. Zenke, of course.”<sup>24</sup>

The setting of the Brooks’ home in Irving Park is significant, as the neighborhood was designed and “destined to be the ideal and dominant residential section of Greensboro.”<sup>25</sup> The Irving Park neighborhood was designed for exclusivity and was heavily planned. The recreational golf course was comparable to neighborhoods like Myers Park in Charlotte and Country Club Estates in Winston-Salem.<sup>26</sup> The Brooks family, one of the most influential in Greensboro at the time, owed much of their success to Aubrey L. Brooks’ thriving legal career and his experience as the vice president of the Dixie Fire Insurance Company and vice president and general counsel of the Jefferson Standard Life Insurance Company. Brooks was also president of the North Carolina Bar Association, and served as president of Greensboro Chamber of Commerce in 1916.<sup>27</sup>

In 1915, the Irving Park company purchased 12 to 15 acres of land east of the Greensboro Country Club, and in turn, the country club acquired 30 acres of land to the west. During this land change, a new drive was constructed for about \$14,000 with the construction of a large semi-circle that ended in front of the Brooks’ home as well as roads laid in concrete.<sup>28</sup> Later, landscape developments that would continue to shape the picturesque suburb were introduced by city planner John Nolen who extended the roads, parks, and developable lots west to Battleground Avenue.<sup>29</sup>

### *Family Ownership*

Aubrey L. Brooks (Appendix 2) was born in Person County, North Carolina in 1871, and, as a student, pursued his education at both the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Kentucky. In 1893 he graduated with his law degree from UNC Chapel Hill. He first practiced as a lawyer in Person County. At the age of 23, he attracted state attention with a nomination for state senate, but could not accept the nomination due to the minimum of 25 years of age for service. The *Greensboro Daily News* profiled Brooks as a prosecuting attorney in 1906 as having a “wonderful gift of oratory” and the ability to get to “the heart of the opponent’s defense as incisively and with as little noise and bluster as a surgeon’s lancet going where the skilled hand directs.”<sup>30</sup> Brooks’ legal career lasted for 50 years, and is recounted in his autobiographical memoir *A Southern Lawyer: Fifty Years at the Bar*.

Aubrey married Helen Higbie of New Jersey in 1910. There may be confusion in the historic record as to Helen’s full name. She is listed in multiple sources as Helen Thornton Brooks, Helen Higbie Brooks, Helen

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<sup>23</sup> William Pahlmann, “A Matter of Taste, The Young Man Came South for a Career,” *Greensboro Daily News*, July 11, 1965, page B11.

<sup>24</sup> Jim Schlosser, “Otto Zenke, Interior designer’s business to become an elegant memory,” *Greensboro News and Record*, December 9, 1984, page 1.

<sup>25</sup> “Irving Park (Adjoining the Country Club),” *Greensboro Daily News*, August 27, 1914.

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Briggs, “The Secrets of Irving Park,” Preservation Greensboro, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://preservationgreensboro.org/the-secrets-of-irving-park/>.

<sup>27</sup> Irving Park National Register District, Section 7, page 26.

<sup>28</sup> “Property Changes North of the City,” *Greensboro Daily News*, February 2, 1915.

<sup>29</sup> Briggs, “The Secrets of Irving Park.”

<sup>30</sup> “Who’s who in Greensboro,” *Greensboro Daily News*, April 29, 1906.



Thornton Higbie Brooks, Helen T. Brooks, and Helen H. Brooks. Her gravestone lists her name as “Helen Higbie Brooks” as does Aubrey Brooks in his memoir (Appendix 3). Helen Brooks was described in *The Greensboro Patriot* on October 27, 1910 as “a member of a prominent and wealthy family of Newark and is a young woman of great charm and many accomplishments. Her contributions to leading magazines have given her a reputation in the world of literature.” She had visited Greensboro and Asheville, and was “well known to many people.”<sup>31</sup> Helen supported her husband in his two Congressional campaigns and hosted major events in their Irving Park home.

Aubrey Brooks recounted his desire to live in a stately antebellum style home in his memoirs *A Southern Lawyer: Fifty Years at the Bar*. By 1912 Greensboro Country Club’s golf course and clubhouse were constructed. The Brooks’ selected an eight-acre tract in front of the golf course and the club. Poplar Hall was one of the first homes built in Irving Park, and was named for the “stately tulip poplar, the largest in the county” in front of the home. Here is an excerpt from his memoir about his desire for the home style:

“Fortune and finance now happily combined to bring to fruition a dream of my boyhood. In youth I had looked with admiration at the stately ante-bellum Georgian mansions in Virginia and North Carolina, and wistfully longed that I might some day own one. My ideal was Mount Vernon, but to reproduce it in a house with modern conveniences and improvements without sacrificing its architectural simplicity and charm was a task for which at first I was unprepared.”<sup>32</sup>

In his political career, Aubrey L. Brooks campaigned for the United States Senate in the Democratic Party in 1920 against incumbent Lee. S. Overman. He campaigned twice for political office, but was never elected. His name was also submitted to Presidents Wilson and Hoover as a candidate for appointment to the United States Supreme Court. The time he spent campaigning brought suffragists to Greensboro. In *The Greensboro Daily News* the editorial discussed that he supported women’s suffrage, and “championed the cause long before it became popular.” Brooks classified himself as a “progressive” Democrat.<sup>33</sup>

The Brooks’ showed their support for the Suffragette Movement through multiple supporting events held in their Irving Park home on Sunset Drive. On January 28, 1920 Helen Brooks hosted an afternoon gathering with prominent women of Greensboro, names that are familiar today: Sternberger, Schenck, Cone, Staples, Price, and Brandt. The *Greensboro Daily News* recorded the decorations were themed with suffragette colors, daffodils and California daisies. “Hundreds of guests” visited the following rooms in the Neoclassical mansion: the sun parlor, library, den, back hall, dining room, and reception room.<sup>34</sup> In February 1922, the Brooks’ hosted a luncheon for the League of Women Voters of North Carolina in their home. Prominent attendees of the event included Mrs. Maud Wood Park, the president of the National League.<sup>35</sup>

Aubrey Lee Brooks died in his home on January 10, 1958. Helen Higbie Brooks died March 2, 1974. Both are buried in the historic Green Hill Cemetery. Their lives involved charity and philanthropy. Towards the end of Aubrey Brooks’ life, he created a million dollar scholarship trust fund “to enable needy students to attend State College in Raleigh, Women’s College in Greensboro and the University in Chapel Hill.” The eleven scholarships initially helped students from 11 counties in North Carolina. Brooks’ sons, Thornton

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<sup>31</sup> “Marriage of Mr. Brooks and Miss Higbie Announced,” *The Greensboro Patriot*, October 27, 1910.

<sup>32</sup> Aubrey L. Brooks, *A Southern Lawyer: Fifty Years at the Bar* (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 93.

<sup>33</sup> “Concerning Brooks,” *Greensboro Daily News*, April 4, 1920.

<sup>34</sup> “Delightful Suffrage Reception,” *Greensboro Daily News*, January 29, 1920.

<sup>35</sup> “Prominent Women in City,” *Greensboro Daily News*, February 16, 1922.

Higbie and James Taylor, were trustees of the foundation.<sup>36</sup> Today, the scholarship benefits high school seniors from a 14-county area in North Carolina for up to \$12,000.<sup>37</sup>

Their son Dr. James “Taylor” Brooks and his wife Dr. Jean Elizabeth Bailey Brooks became the second owners of the home on April 29, 1977, with Taylor’s older brother Thornton Higbie Brooks as executor of their parents estate (Appendix 4). Thornton and Margaret Brooks were living next door at 415 Sunset Drive in their French Eclectic home, now designated as a Guilford County Local Landmark. Taylor and Jean were married in 1948, and living in their own residence prior to inheriting Poplar Hall. The couple shared a doctor's office in Greensboro and were philanthropists. The doctors established the Brooks Scholar in Academic Medicine Program at Bowman Gray School of Medicine to benefit junior faculty members in research and writing, which continues today as an ongoing scholarship.<sup>38</sup>

Dr. Jean Bailey Brooks, mother of current owner Helen Elizabeth Brooks, was a woman of many firsts. She graduated from Duke University and was the first woman to graduate from the Wake Forest Bowman Gray School of Medicine. Dr. Jean Bailey met Dr. James Taylor Brooks in residency, and they practiced medicine in Greensboro together starting in 1948. Dr. Jean Brooks was the first female Gynecologist and Obstetrician in Greensboro, NC. She served as Director of the Greensboro Maternity Clinic from 1948-1952. Dr. Jean Brooks was a community-oriented professional who served on Boards such as the Bowman Gray School of Medicine, Eastern Music Festival, Children’s Home Society, UNCG Musical Arts, and Greensboro Academy of Medicine among many more as listed in her obituary. Both doctors advanced higher education opportunities through endowments to Bowman Gray, UNCG, and Greensboro Day School.<sup>39</sup> Dr. Jean Brooks also organized the Quota Club for professional and administrative women of Greensboro. The club highlighted women’s contributions with the Woman of the Year Awards, and it also worked for the education of disabled children.<sup>40</sup>

Dr. James Taylor Brooks died on February 21, 1988. Jean B. Brooks died on June 17, 2006.<sup>41</sup> The house passed to their daughter Helen Elizabeth Brooks, who is the current owner and resident.

### *Other residents*

Helen E. Brooks recounted to the nomination writers that her grandparents, Aubrey and Helen, employed several staff, some of whom were married and lived in the attic apartment of the house (Fig. 11s-t). The first records of these staff were recorded in the 1930 Census. John Perry (30) was the chauffeur and his wife Minnie Perry (25) was the cook, Gertrude Fleet (78) and Maggie Wright (20) were maids, and Irvin Minor (60), the gardener. The Perrys, Fleet, and Wright were African Americans and Minor was white. None of these employees are listed as living in the house in the 1940 Census, but the Perrys are listed as a chauffeur and cook in a private house working 55-60 hours a week.<sup>42</sup> It is possible that they continued to work for the Brooks family while living in a separate residence.

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<sup>36</sup> “Scholarship Fund Set Up,” *The News and Observer*, December 8, 1955.

<sup>37</sup> “Aubrey Lee Brooks Scholarship,” College Foundation of North Carolina, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://www.cfnc.org/pay-for-college/apply-for-financial-aid/aubrey-lee-brooks-scholarship/>.

<sup>38</sup> Digital Forsyth, Wake Forest University Coy C. Carpenter Library, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/handle/10339/15012?show=full>.

<sup>39</sup> Obituary, “Jean Bailey Brooks” *News and Observer*, June 18, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Paula S. Jordan, *Women of Guilford County, North Carolina, A Study of Women’s Contributions 1740-1979* (Greensboro, NC: Greensboro Printing Company, 1979), 140.

<sup>41</sup> Deed Book R6846, Page 2747.

<sup>42</sup> 1940 United States Federal Census.

During the Jim Crow era, many African Americans worked as domestic servants, yet they were legally barred from owning a home in some neighborhoods due to racial deed restrictions. The only way a person of color could live in one of these neighborhoods was if they were employed as live-in servants. Even after Jim Crow segregation laws were struck from the books, wealthier neighborhoods of Greensboro implemented racial deed restrictions.<sup>43</sup> The Irving Park deed made on May 29, 1912 between A.M. Scales and Aubrey Brooks stated the following: “That the premises shall not be occupied by negroes or persons with negro blood; provided, that this shall not be construed to prevent the living upon the premises of any negro servant, whose time is employed for domestic purposes by the occupants of the dwelling house together with the family of such servant.”<sup>44</sup>

## Chain of Title

- **Book 207 Page 283**
  - Recorded on March 1, 1909
  - Indenture for land A.M. Scales and wife Bessie T. Scales (party of the first part) and A.W. McAllister (party of the second part), and the Southern Life and Trust Company (party of the third part).
- **Book 236 Page 312**
  - Recorded on May 29, 1912
  - Grantor: A.M. Scales & A.W. McAlister
  - Grantee: A.L. Brooks and his wife Helen T. Brooks of Guilford County
  - Released the lien on the deed of trust from Deed Book 207, page 283.
- **Book 295 Page 210**
  - Recorded on April 1, 1913
  - Grantor: A.L. Brooks
  - Grantee: Helen T. Brooks
  - “A lot situated near the Greensboro Country Club, fronting 300 feet on Summit Avenue and running back 500 feet to A.M. Scales line. It being the lot upon which the parties hereto are beginning to build a home.
- **Book 269 Page 80**
  - Recorded on April 16, 1915
  - Southern Life & Trust Co. Deed of Trust from Irving Park Co for land that will become the property of A.L. Brooks and Helen Brooks.
- **Book 274 Page 471**
  - Recorded on May 5, 1916
  - Grantor: Irving Park Company and Southern Life & Trust Company
  - Grantee: Helen T. Brooks
- **Book 377 Page 0417**
  - Recorded on March 11, 1922
  - Grantor: Irving Park Company, and the Southern Life & Trust Company, released the land from a Deed of Trust, “dated April 16th, 1915, and recorded in Book 269, page 80” to A.L. Brooks and wife Helen T. Brooks of Guilford County.
  - Grantee: A.L. Brooks and Helen T. Brooks

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<sup>43</sup> Marvin Brown, “Historic and Architectural Resources of Greensboro, North Carolina, 1880-1941,” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1991), Section E, page 28.

<sup>44</sup> Guilford County, North Carolina Deeds Book 236, page 312.

- **Book 450 Page 342**
  - Recorded on May 22, 1924
  - Grantor: Irving Park Company and Pilot Life Insurance Company (successor to Southern Life & Trust Company)
  - Grantee: Helen T. Brooks
- **Book 2858 Page 288**
  - Recorded on April 29, 1977
  - Grantor: Thornton H. Brooks, as Executor of the Last Will and Testament and Estate of Helen T. Brooks (Deceased), and Thornton H. Brooks and his wife, Margaret W. Brooks
  - Grantee: James Taylor Brooks
- **Book 3717 Page 545**
  - Recorded on January 30, 1989
  - Grantor: Jean B. Brooks and NCNB National Bank of North Carolina, as Executors of the Last Will and Testament and Estate of J. Taylor Brooks (Deceased)
  - Grantee: Jean B. Brooks
  - Estate Asset Distribution Deed
- **Book R6846 Page 2746-2748**
  - Recorded on January 18, 2008
  - Grantor: Bank of America, N.A. as trustee of Jean B. Brooks Revocable Management Trust Jean B. Brooks (Deceased)
  - Grantee: Helen E. Brooks
  - “The certain real property, and all improvements thereon, depicted as ‘Lot 2’ on that certain plat recorded at Plat Book 173, Page 31, Guilford County Registry.”
- **Last Will and Testament of Helen T. Brooks Film #74-24-632**

## V. Finding Aid for Photographs

- Fig. 1: Setting
- Fig. 2: Front (North) Elevation
- Fig. 3: Side (East) Elevation
- Fig. 4: Side (West) Elevation
- Fig. 5: Rear (South) Elevation
- Fig. 6-10: Exterior Features
  - Fig. 6: Concrete keystone
  - Fig. 7: Columns
  - Fig. 8: Inset pilasters
  - Fig. 9: Windows
  - Fig. 10: Doors
- Fig. 11: Interiors



## VIII. Figures

Fig. 1: Setting





Fig. 2: Front (North) Elevation





Fig. 3: Side (East) Elevation





Fig. 4: Side (West) Elevation





Fig. 5: Rear (South) Elevation





Fig. 6: Concrete Keystone



Fig. 7a: Facade (north) elevation ionic columns.





Fig. 7b: Rear (south) elevation ionic columns and pedimented portico



Fig. 8: Inset pilaster on the north elevation





Fig. 9a: Six-over-one window found on all elevations



Fig. 9b: Rounded five-light fan window in pediment



Fig. 10a: Front (north) elevation door





Fig. 10b: Rear (south) elevation door





Fig 11a: Main foyer facing south





Fig 11b.: Main foyer facing north





Fig. 11c: Library facing south





Fig. 11d: Sunroom facing east





Fig. 11e: Music Room facing east





Fig. 11f: Dining room facing southwest



Fig. 11g: Reception room facing southwest





Fig. 11h: Kitchen facing north



Fig. 11i: Rear stair in kitchen facing east





Fig. 11j: Bedroom chamber, known as “Eleanor's Room,” as Elenor Roosevelt, a friend of Helen Higbie Brooks, stayed in this room, facing southwest



Fig. 11k: Bathroom connected to “Eleanor’s Room” facing southwest





Fig. 111: Sleeping porch facing southwest



Fig. 11m: Bedroom facing south





Fig. 11n: Curvilinear bedroom door on second level landing



Fig. 11o: Second level landing facing north





Fig. 11p: Bathroom facing west



Fig. 11q: Bathroom shower with original shower fixture (similar to Biltmore) facing south





Fig. 11r: Bedroom facing west



Fig. 11s: Third level apartment facing east





Fig. 11t: Third level apartment facing northeast



## VII. Appendix

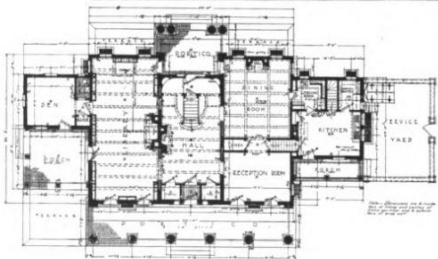
### *Supporting Photographs and Documents*

Appendix 1: A. Raymond Ellis designs for the A. L. Brooks House in the March 1915 addition of *Architecture* magazine, Volumes 31 and 32.

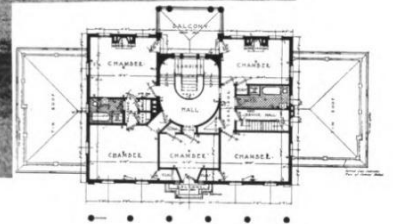
MARCH, 1915.

ARCHITECTURE

PLATE XV.



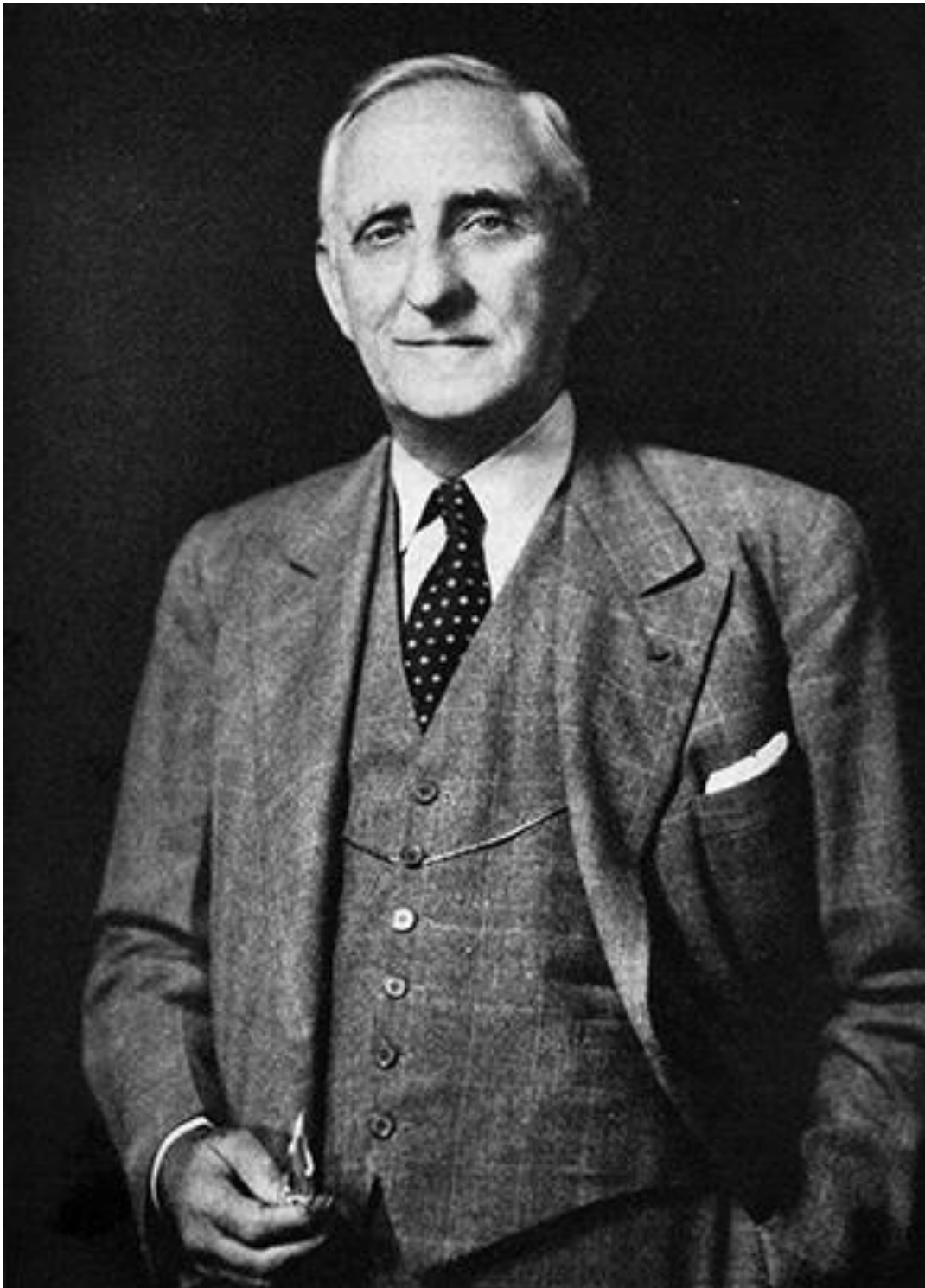
HOUSE, A. L. BROOKS, GREENSBORO, N. C.



A. RAYMOND ELLIS, ARCHITECT.



Appendix 2: Aubrey L. Brooks



Appendix 3: Helen Higbie Brooks Headstone





Appendix 4: Dr. James Taylor and Dr. Jean Bailey Brooks



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**I, THE UNDERSIGNED, HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THE ABOVE STATEMENTS ARE TRUE AND ACCURATE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF; AND SUPPORT LANDMARK DESIGNATION OF THE PROPERTY DEFINED HEREIN.**

I also acknowledge that the Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission may require additional information.

W. E. Brooks 4/27/2022

Signature of Owner

Date

I also acknowledge that the designation includes the interior, interior features and details; exterior, exterior features and details of all structures; and land, unless otherwise noted in the application. Any alterations of the property and/or features designated, requires an approved *Certificate of Appropriateness (COA)* issued by the Guilford County Historic Preservation Commission.

W. E. Brooks 4/27/2022

Signature of Owner

Date