

NARBROOK PARK  
Bounded by Windsor, Service,  
Conway, and Price Roads  
Narberth ~~Borough~~  
Montgomery County  
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-6054

HABS  
PA  
46-NARB,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 37127  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NARBROOK PARK

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Location: Bounded by Windsor, Service, Conway and Price roads, Narberth Borough, Montgomery Co., Pennsylvania.

Significance: Narbrook Park is one of the first pre-World War I "garden city" projects executed in the United States. It is a model community of mostly architect-designed homes that was the result of community planning rather than a builder's development.

Description: Narbrook Park is a neighborhood of thirty-five detached, single-family dwellings in a designed landscape surrounding two community greens. The east branch of Indian Creek runs through the larger green toward Cobb Creek in a southerly direction. The houses all have the advantage of fronting the community greens, or open park space. The houses also front Narbrook Park Road, which winds through the neighborhood. Originally, the driveways and garages were built in the rear of the dwellings with access from the roads behind. Most residences retain this design, however a few homes have added driveways through their front lawns to provide direct vehicle access to Narbrook Park Road. Robert Anderson Pope's plan shows an outdoor theater set within the northern loop of Narbrook Park Road. It was incorporated into the original design, yet it is no longer used.

The homes in Narbrook Park are a varied group of mainly architect designed homes. The houses are generally two to two-and-one-half stories and constructed of combinations of stone, brick and wood, sometimes covered with stucco. The roofs are all gabled, including many with cross gables or gambrel shapes, and most retain their original slate shingles. Windows and doors vary significantly among the dwellings, however, most windows consist of double-hung sash and most doors are wood panelled. In addition, many of the houses have either roof or wall dormers.

The houses are eclectic designs generally in the Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival and Craftsman styles. Many of the Colonial Revival residences fit into a subtype known as Dutch Colonial, with side gambrels and long shed dormers. Under deed restrictions, all of the houses had to cost at least \$5000, which qualified them as middle class housing with respects to the surrounding communities.

History: Narbrook Park was originally designed in 1914 as "Narberth Garden", a model community for the Narberth Community Association. According to a May 8, 1914 article in the Main Line Times titled, "Narberth Plans to Build Garden City," Narberth's chief executive, burgess George M. Henry, devised a plan to develop a swampy area of Narberth into a "garden city." In that same year, the Narberth Civic Association became actively involved in the project, hired a model community expert, Robert

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Anderson Pope, and began a campaign for subscriptions. Burgess Henry announced that there would be lots for thirty-one detached modern homes and plenty of garden space. His goal was to make it a beautiful park space that would be the center of town improvement.

Robert Anderson Pope's 1914 preliminary plan, "Narberth Garden," became Narbrook Park after the civic association held a contest to choose the official name. Fourteen acres of land was purchased and assembled, and the park was laid out in 1915. The primary parcel of land was a eight-acre meadow purchased by Robert Owen, a prominent Merion Welshman and state assemblyman, in 1695, and still owned by Owen's descendants in 1915. After Pope designed the park community, citizens from Narberth and Wynnewood drew lots to determine which property each one would buy and develop. Of the original forty-three lots, a 1915 map shows thirty-two taken by nineteen subscribers. The prices varied from \$1100 to \$1600. In May of 1915 there was a groundbreaking ceremony and shortly thereafter the general contractor, Alexander C. Shand, Jr., started grading, road building, and stream emplacement. By 1921, thirty-five houses had been completed under deed restrictions to cost at least \$5000. Nearly every house was architect-designed.

The Borough of Narberth did not accept ownership of the roads or commons, so ownership of the common areas remained in the hands of the original trustees of the Narberth Civic Association. This organization, however, was virtually defunct. Thus, the homeowners organized themselves as the Narbrook Park Improvement Association. In 1926 they incorporated, and by 1927 they were deeded the park property. At this time, the Association became officially obliged to maintain and improve the roads and common grounds within Narbrook Park.

Several individuals were instrumental in the design of Narbrook Park. Foremost was Robert Anderson Pope, a landscape architect and specialist in the design of model communities. Pope was from Massachusetts and had studied landscape architecture at Harvard with Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. In 1908, Pope worked with Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. on the Forest Hills Gardens project in Long Island, New York. Olmsted had significant influence on Pope and several of the underlying planning principles of Forest Hills Gardens are reflected in the design of Narbrook Park. In Forest Hills Gardens, a pamphlet describing the purpose and scheme of the new development, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. explained "all roads must be 'quiet, attractive' residential streets, not 'fantastically crooked,' but laid out 'so as to discourage their use as thoroughfares' and kept narrow to increase the area of lawns and front gardens." Pope incorporated these principles in Narbrook Park by organizing the neighborhood around quiet streets focused on parks and open spaces. Service uses consumed very

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little space and automobile traffic within the development was diverted to the streets surrounding the area. Also, like Forest Hills Gardens, the homeowners' association enforced restrictions and controlled architectural development by requiring that all builders get design approval from a consulting architect before proceeding with home construction.

George Burdett Ford was another person instrumental in the success of Narbrook Park. Ford was a renowned, Harvard-educated town planner from New York who, curiously, had ties to Forest Hills Gardens as an adviser to the Russell Sage Foundation, which established and owned Forest Hills Gardens. The Narberth Civic Association hired Ford as a consultant to the Narbrook Park project, and he came and spoke to the citizens on the benefits of a garden city.

Shortly after Pope designed Narbrook Park, David Knickerbocker Boyd was appointed general consulting architect. D.K. Boyd started his career like several other Philadelphia architects, such as Horace Trumbauer and William Price, by working in the northern and western suburbs for builders Wendell & Smith. As consulting architect for Narbrook Park, he was responsible for reviewing and approving the designs of all structures to be built in the new park community. Boyd and his partner, Victor Darwin Abel, also designed several of the homes. These included building nos. nine, fifteen, eighteen (Victor Abel's home), thirty, and thirty-three. In addition, building nos. thirty-four and forty were single, detached house adaptations of a Boyd & Abel design for a semi-detached house that was shown in a 1918 Narberth Civic Association advertisement. Both homes were built by Alexander C. Shand, Jr. Several of the houses designed by Boyd and Abel had red shingle roofs like the houses at Forest Hills Gardens. In the 1930s, architect William Webb Donohoe built a house adapted from nos. thirty-four and forty, on a lot he owned at no. five. Donohoe had designed St. Margaret Church a Narberth a few years earlier.

Wallace & Warner designed four homes in Narbrook Park, including building nos. twelve, twenty-one, thirty-two and thirty-four. They are all variations of the Colonial Revival with side-gambrelled roofs. Brenton G. Wallace and Frederick Warner began their partnership in 1914. They became very successful designing Cotswold, Norman Farmhouse, and Pennsylvania Farmhouse style residences in the suburbs. They later specialized in designing commercial and industrial buildings, mostly along the Main Line.

Hulme and Dull designed house no. twenty-four (and possibly a second although it has not been verified). This is a Dutch Colonial Revival house with side gambrels. Next door, house no. twenty-three, was another Colonial Revival house designed by

architect and engineer, Clarence Woolmington.

Anton Emil Wohlert, landscape architect and nurseryman, was hired to carry out Pope's planting scheme for both the common space and the individual properties. Wohlert was one of the first nurserymen to introduce the Japanese Cherry Blossom tree into the United States. He was one of the largest Cherry Blossom dealers and supplied trees to parks all over the country, including the original plantings to Anacostia Park in Washington, D.C. Wohlert supervised Narbrook Park's plantings and grounds for several decades and donated numerous Japanese Cherry Blossom trees, Narberth's town tree, to Narbrook Park. Wohlert lived in Narbrook Park (Building # 30 designed by Boyd & Abel) and was a leader in the movement to organize the Narbrook Park Improvement Association in the 1920s.

In 1938-39, the neighborhood received assistance from Work Projects Administration workers to rebuild the banks of the East Branch of the Indian Creek as part of a program to improve Narberth's storm water drainage system. Outside assistance, however, was not common and most of Narbrook Park's maintenance and preservation has been carried out by the residents. There has been much community solidarity and the residents have stayed enthusiastically loyal through the years. They have helped preserve the original design and park setting. The only unfortunate intrusions have been the addition of several driveways fronting the common green spaces.

Sources:

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"D. Knickerbocker Boyd, Architect." Scrapbook of Clippings at the Radnor Historical Society.

Donohoe, Victoria and George Moore. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Inventory of Historic Places Form: Narbrook Park. September, 1981. This form contains a map showing land transactions on the Merion Welsh tract, located within the Borough of Narberth, on the present site of Narbrook Park.

Donohoe, Victoria. "Clues and Findings: Swedish-Indian Trading Post." The Bulletin of the Historical Society of Montgomery County. Vol. XXIII, No. 3, Fall 1982, p. 251-55.

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. Interview with HABS Historian. August 12, 1994. Ms. Donohoe is a resident of Narbrook Park and is currently writing a book on the Borough of Narberth. She provided much information on the area with specific data concerning the architects who designed various homes in Narbrook Park.

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Introducing Narbrook Park. January 1980. Pamphlet issued by the Narbrook Park Improvement Association which describes the origins of the park information about the Association.

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Morell, Rick. "102-Year-Old History Maker." The Charlotte Observer, Metro Section, March 27, 1992, p. 1C. This article is about Alexander Shand, Jr., a builder of several houses in Narbrook Park.

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Historian: Janet G. Blutstein, HABS Historian, 1994.