

History of the Moore-Irwin House 2: Irwin, Okie & After

Twiss and the WACP assessment are in agreement on both the chronology of the house after Richard Moore's death, and the fact that the house remained largely unchanged through the end of the century (WACP Assessment, p. 2.4; Twiss pp. 11-13.) After Richard's death in 1823, the house first passed to his son Edwin. Edwin Moore died in 1894 and left the house to his children who sold it to Frederick Poth in 1903. Poth died two years later and his executors sold the house to Edward Binns. By this time, the house was known as "Winter Quarters Farm" for its connection to General Muhlenberg and the encampment. Binns then sold the house to Alexander D. Irwin of Philadelphia on May 1, 1918. Irwin was co-owner of Irwin and Leighton, Inc., a construction company.

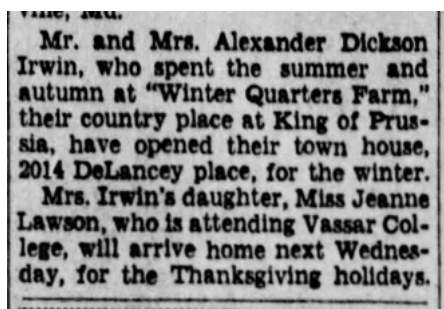
The Irwin Family were among the elite of Philadelphia, often appearing in the society pages of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (figs. 1-3.) Irwin used the house as his country home in spring/summer, spending the rest of the year at his town home in the city on DeLancey Street. Presumably, a caretaker would be employed to watch over the house when the family returned to Philadelphia.



**Open Country
Residence for
Early Summer**

MR. AND MRS. ALEXANDER D. IRWIN, of 2014 DeLancey place, have closed their town house and are occupying "Winter Quarters Farm," their country place at King of Prussia, for the spring and early summer.

Fig. 1. Announcement of the Irwin family's annual move to their country home for the spring and summer in the Philadelphia Inquirer Society Pages, June 6, 1935. Accessed at Newspapers.com: <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-philadelphia-inquirer-1935-06-05-inq/141785332/>



Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Dickson Irwin, who spent the summer and autumn at "Winter Quarters Farm," their country place at King of Prussia, have opened their town house, 2014 DeLancey place, for the winter. Mrs. Irwin's daughter, Miss Jeanne Lawson, who is attending Vassar College, will arrive home next Wednesday, for the Thanksgiving holidays.

Fig. 2. Announcement of the Irwin family's annual move back to their town home in the fall in the Philadelphia Inquirer Society Pages, November 18, 1938. Accessed at Newspapers.com: <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-philadelphia-inquirer-1938-11-18-inq/141782058/>



Mr. and Mrs. Alexander D. Irwin, of 2014 DeLancey place, have as their guests at "Winter Quarters Farm," their country place at Valley Forge, Mrs. Irwin's mother, Mrs. E. Simmons, of New York. Mr. and Mrs. Irwin will entertain at a tennis and swimming party, followed by a dinner tomorrow evening at "Winter Quarters Farm." Mrs. Irwin's daughter, Miss Jeanne Lawson, who has been visiting in Connecticut, will shortly go to Newport for a visit before returning home.

Fig. 3. Entertaining at "Winter Quarters Farm" reported in the Philadelphia Inquirer Society Pages, August 8, 1932. Accessed at Newspapers.com: <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-philadelphia-inquirer-1938-11-18-inq/141782058/>

The Irwins often entertained at the house in King of Prussia. The eastern portion of the house, including the circa 1810 addition, had become a kitchen, pantry and laundry, as shown by plans later drawn up before the 1932 expansion of the house. Those plans also show a second story over a portion of the location of the original log dwelling on the east side, labeled “Svts Room.” It is not clear when this second story was added, but it seems likely that Irwin added it soon after he acquired the house. Plans were drawn up by Irwin & Leighton dated May 27, 1918 for changes to the house that include just such an expansion of the servants quarters (fig. 4.) Although much of the items in the plan did not come to pass, such as the extension of the roof to create a large porch area on the south face, the raising of part of the servants quarters to two stories and a change of the footprint of that part of the house must have occurred, as shown by house plans drawn up for the 1932 expansion of the house (figs. 9 & 10.)

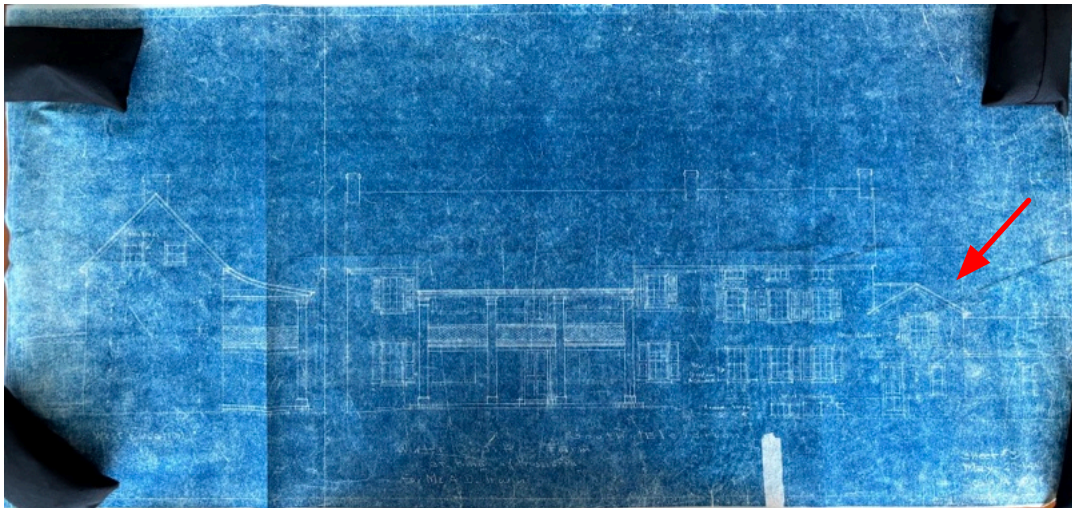


Fig. 4. Plans drawn up May 27, 1918 for changes to the house, not all of which came to pass. At some point, the servants quarters were expanded upward as shown by the arrow. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers Collection. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

Plans were drawn up for an entrance gate house on July 1, 1918, which still stands today (figs. 5 & 6.)

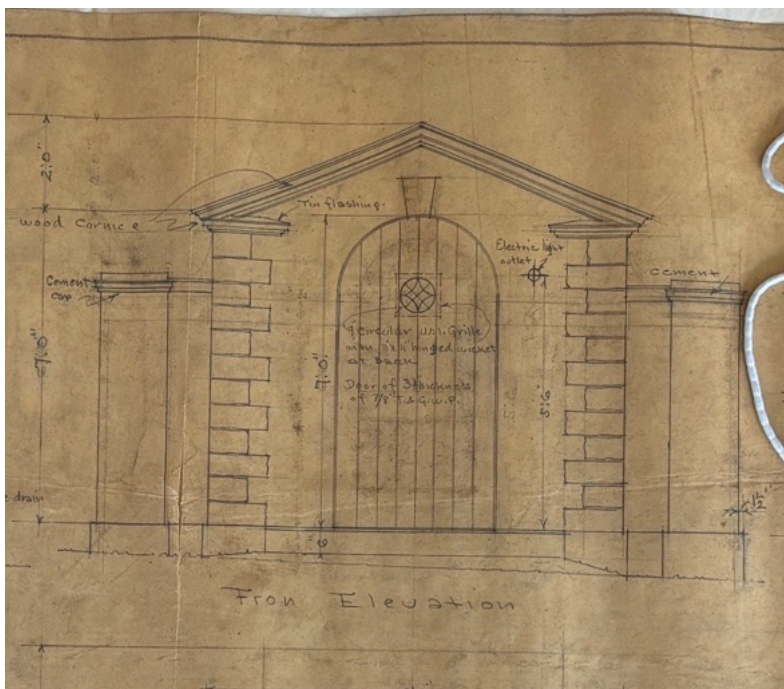


Fig. 5. Detail of plans drawn up July 1, 1918 for an entrance gatehouse. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers Collection. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.



Fig. 6. The entrance gatehouse as it appears today. Current photo.

Plans were drawn up July 1, 1919 for the addition of a pool and bathhouse (fig. 7.) The pool is no longer in existence, and the bath house was changed in 1932.

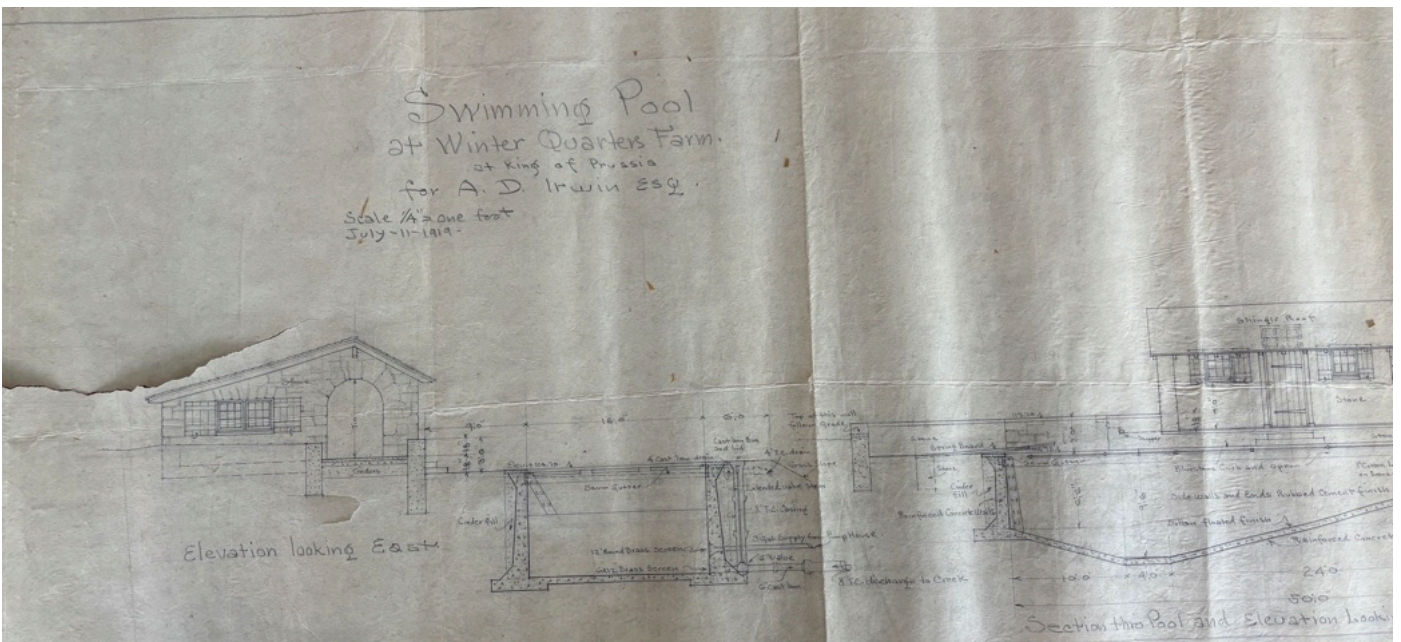


Fig. 7. Plans drawn up July 1, 1919 for the addition of a pool and bath house. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers Collection. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

In 1932, Irwin contracted Richardson Brognard Okie to remodel and add to the house in the Colonial Revival style for which he was famous. In the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers Collection housed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg, there are numerous letters concerning the 1932 project. The earliest communication in the collection that specifically mentions the house in King of Prussia is dated March 15, 1932 (fig. 8.)

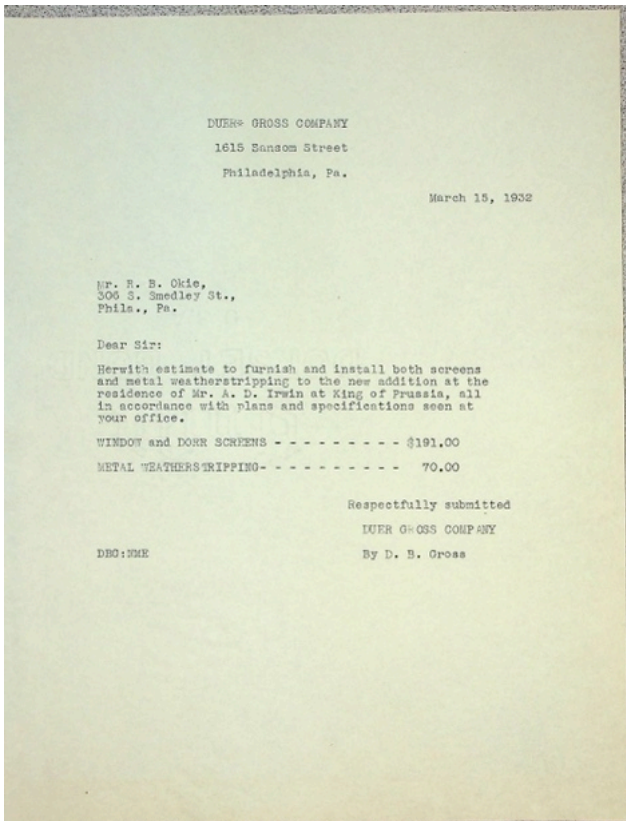


Fig. 8. Letter from Duerr Gross Company to R. Brognard Okie concerning work at the Irwin house in King of Prussia, dated March 15, 1932. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

Altogether, there are 64 letters and dozens of architectural plans in the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers that have to do with the 1932 remodeling and expansion of the house. The main change was the addition of a large “ell” shaped wing to the southern side of the house on the west side (figs 9 & 10.) In addition, an enclosed sun room was added between the new wing and the southern face of the 1820 portion of the house, as well as an enclosed porch on the northern side of the house (figs. 119 & 12.) (The sun room and the enclosed porch have since been removed.)

The extension of 1820 part of the house southward entailed a change in the roofline. Okie designed a cross-gable 90 degrees from the original roofline. This gave the house an additive look, typical of Okie’s style. The extension also had dormer windows that broke the roofline - another signature element of Okie’s style, as are the oversized chimneys (figs. 13-18.)

Okie’s design of the interior of the new wing required a remodeling of the interior of the existing house to match, including the kind of intricate woodwork, carved mantelpieces, built-in cupboard, cabinets, drawers and shelving for which Okie was renowned. Many of the drawings in the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers were done to illustrate the highly detailed woodwork (figs 19 & 20.)

Okie specified in great detail, not only the ornamenting of the woodwork, but also of the hardware throughout the house. He left no less than six hand-written pages of notes for the subcontractor in charge of ironwork (figs. 21 & 22.) A more detailed study of the interior decoration of the house is included in a separate document.

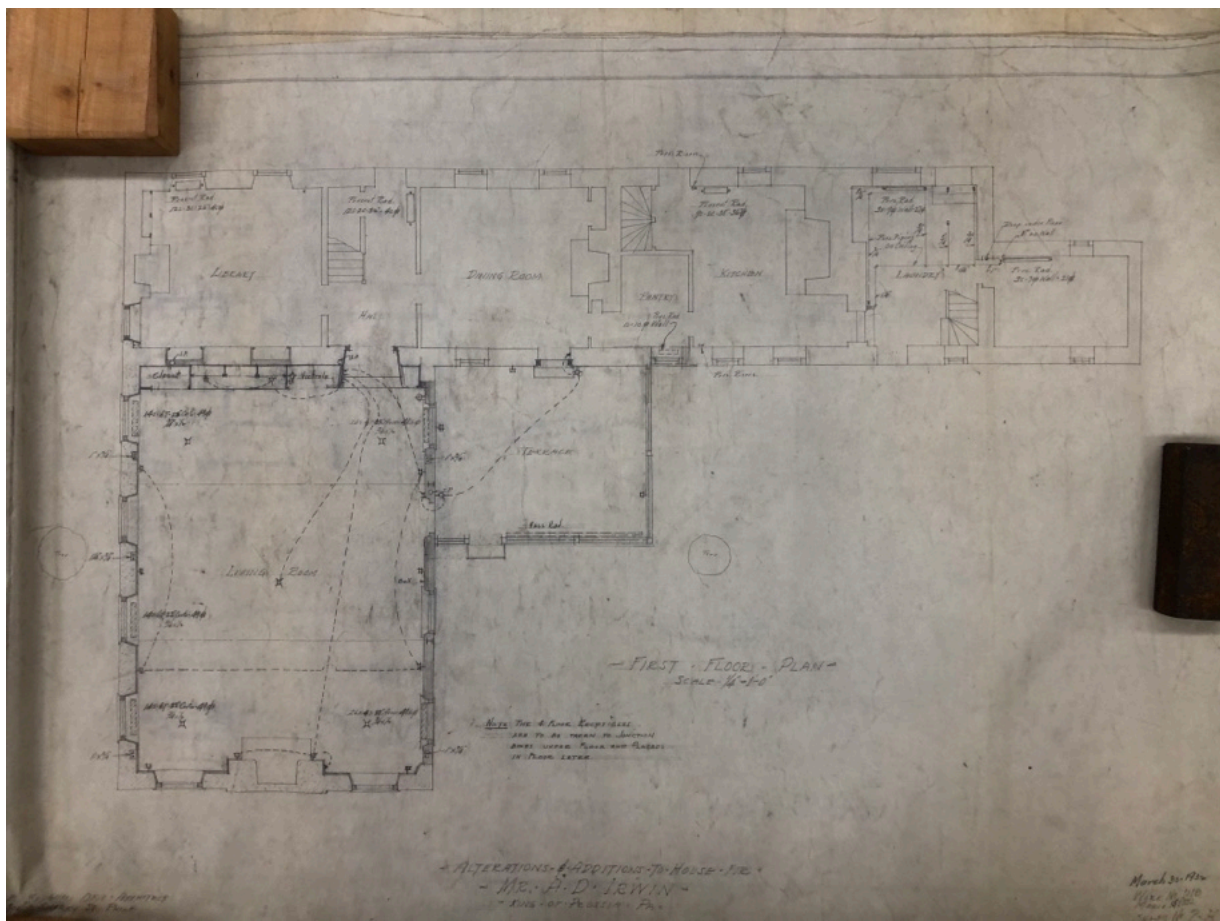


Fig. 9. First floor plan. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

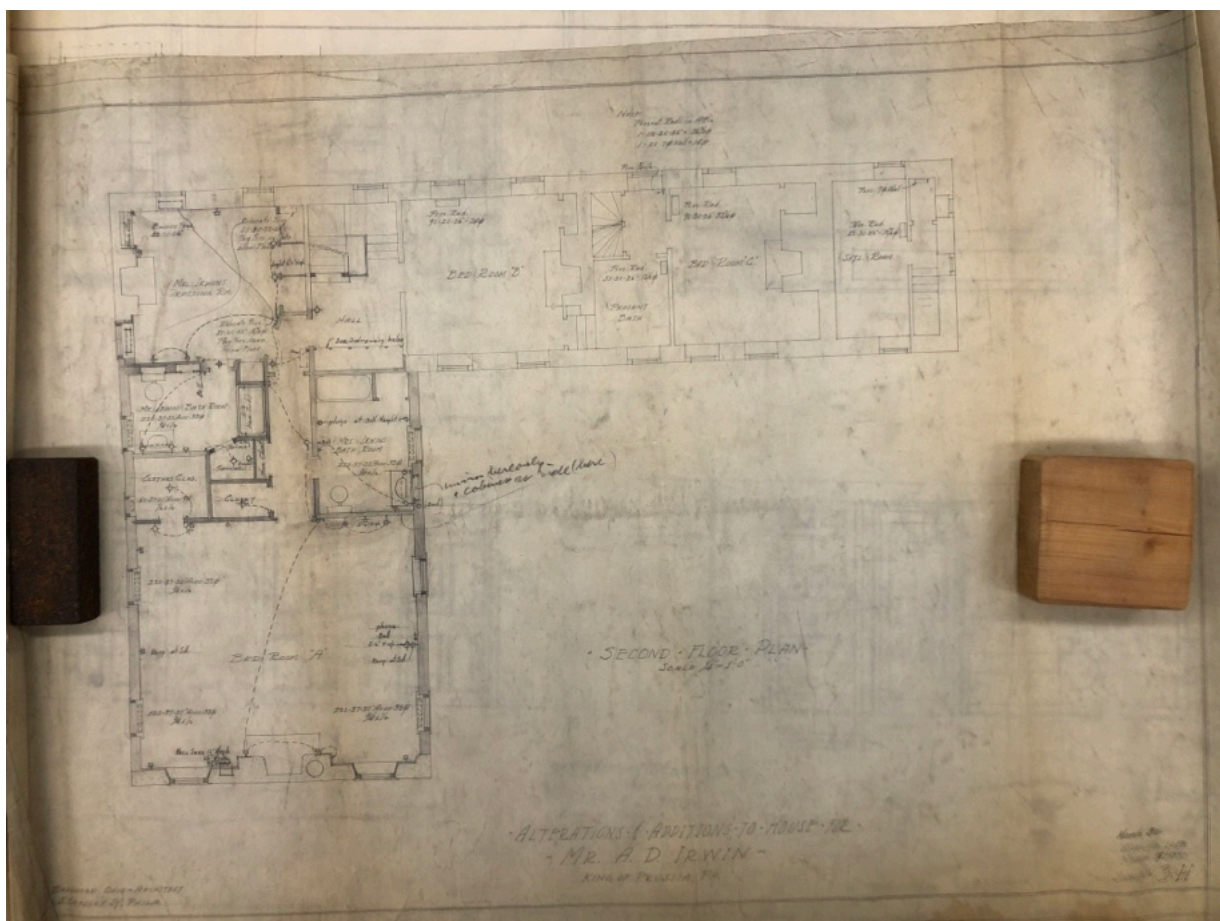


Fig. 10. Second floor plan. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.



Fig. 11. The south side of the house, looking northwest. The 1932 addition is on the left; the sun room (since removed) is in the center of the photo. Photo by Dave Broida in 1979.



Fig. 12. The north side of the house showing the enclosed porch (since removed.). Photo by Dave Broida in 1979.

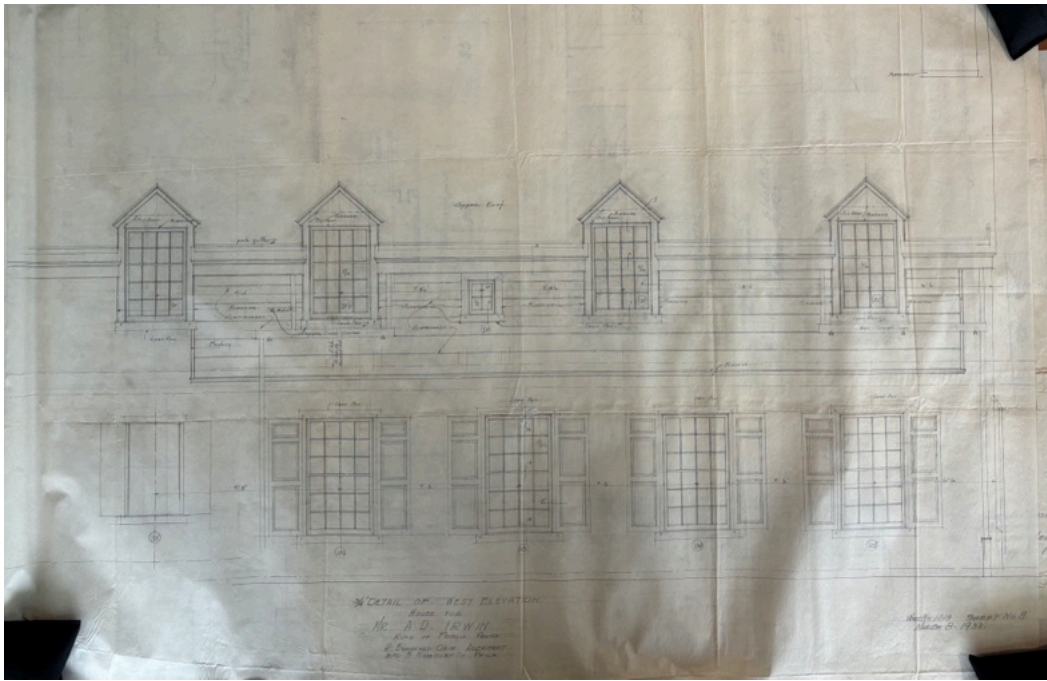


Fig. 13. West side elevation drawing of the addition. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.



Fig. 14. The west side of the 1932 addition showing the dormer windows that break the roofline. Photo by Dave Broida in 1979.



Fig. 15. The north and west side of the house, looking southeast. On the right is the Okie addition with dormer windows that break the roofline and cross-gabled roofline. The large chimneys are also visible. Current photo.



Fig. 16. The south and east side of the house, looking northwest. On the left is the Okie addition with dormer windows that break the roofline. Current photo.



Fig. 17. North side elevation drawing, showing the gabled roof. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.



Fig. 18. South side elevation drawing, showing the gabled roof. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

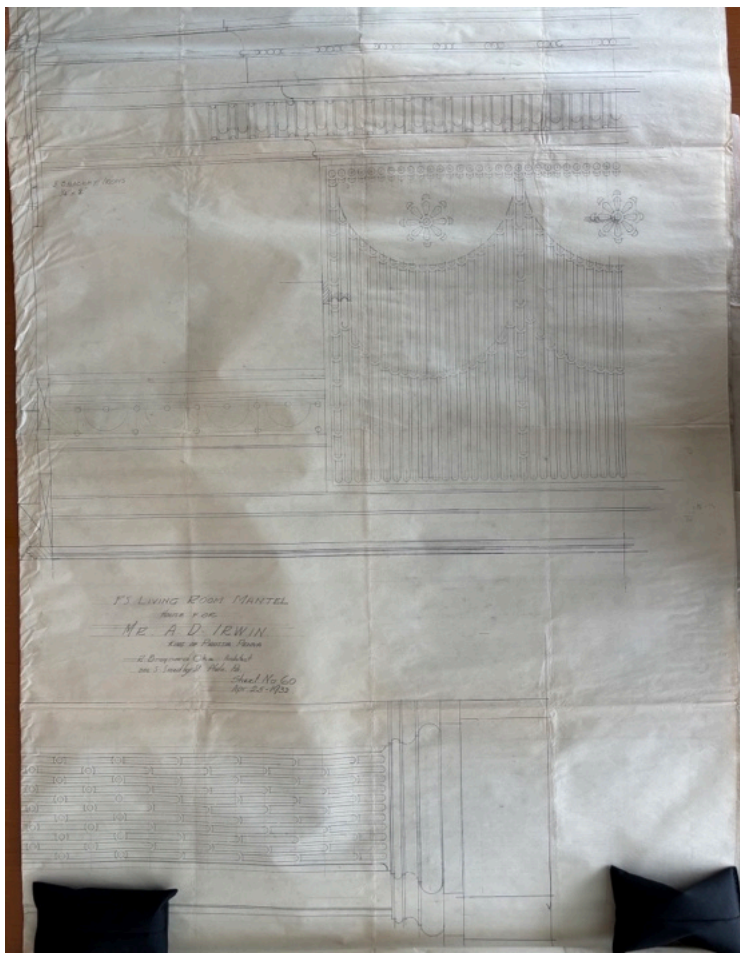


Fig. 19. Detailed drawings of the carving of the mantelpiece woodwork. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.



Fig. 20. Detailed woodwork on the living room mantelpiece. From the archives of the King of Prussia Historical Society.

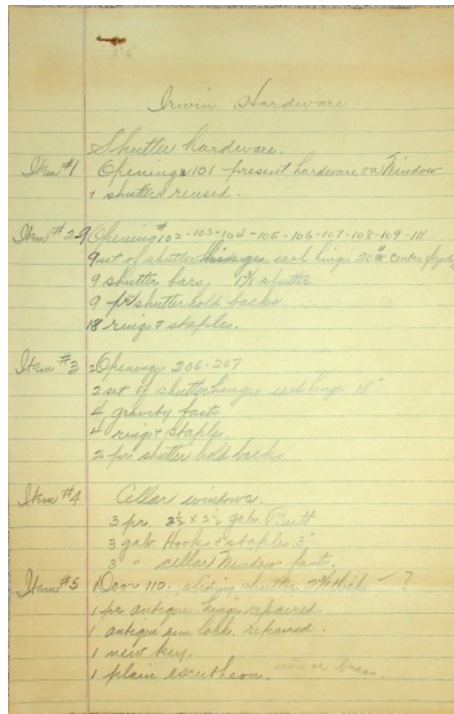
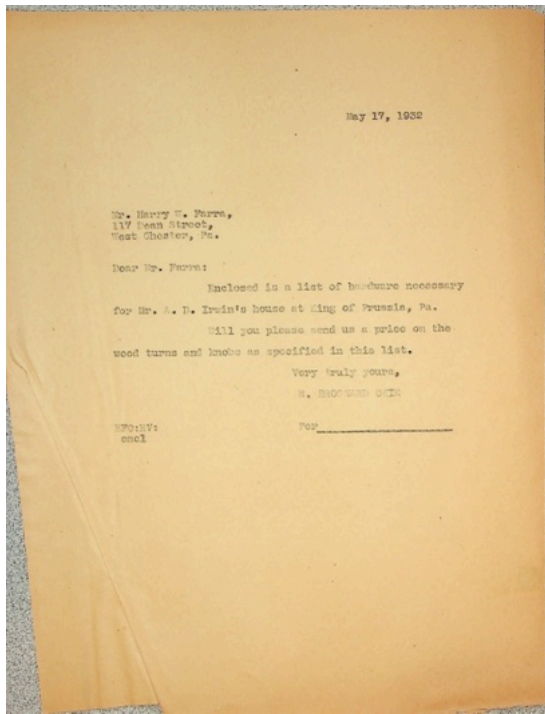


Fig. 21 (left.) Letter from R. Brognard Okie to Harry Farra of West Chester requesting hardware to be made for the 1932 remodeling. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

Figs. 22 (right.) One of six pages, handwritten by Okie, specifying the hardware attached to the letter in fig. 21. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

The letters in the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers detail hardware, new heater, radiators, electrical work, plumbing, painting, a new copper roof and flagstones for the grounds. Okie employed multiple subcontractors to get the work done (fig. 23.)

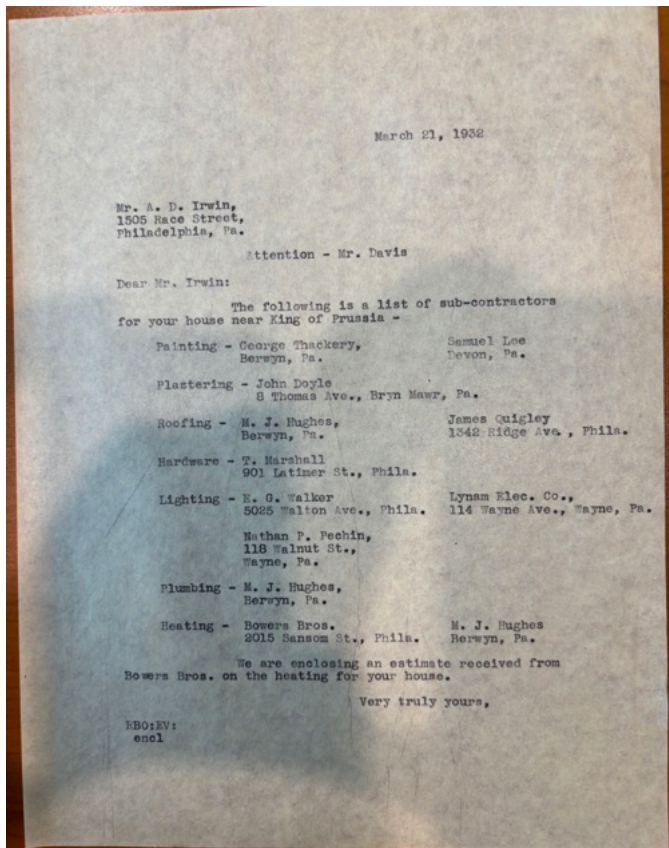


Fig. 23. Letter from R. Brognard Okie to Alexander Irwin on March 21, 1932 listing subcontractors. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

Presumably, Irwin's own company performed the basic construction under Okie's direction. The work of the subcontractors alone, as detailed in the letters, totals over \$6,000, equivalent to over \$135,000 in 2024 - an enormous sum, considering 1932 is during The Great Depression.

In addition to the changes to the house, the bath house was reconstructed into its current form (figs. 24 & 25.)

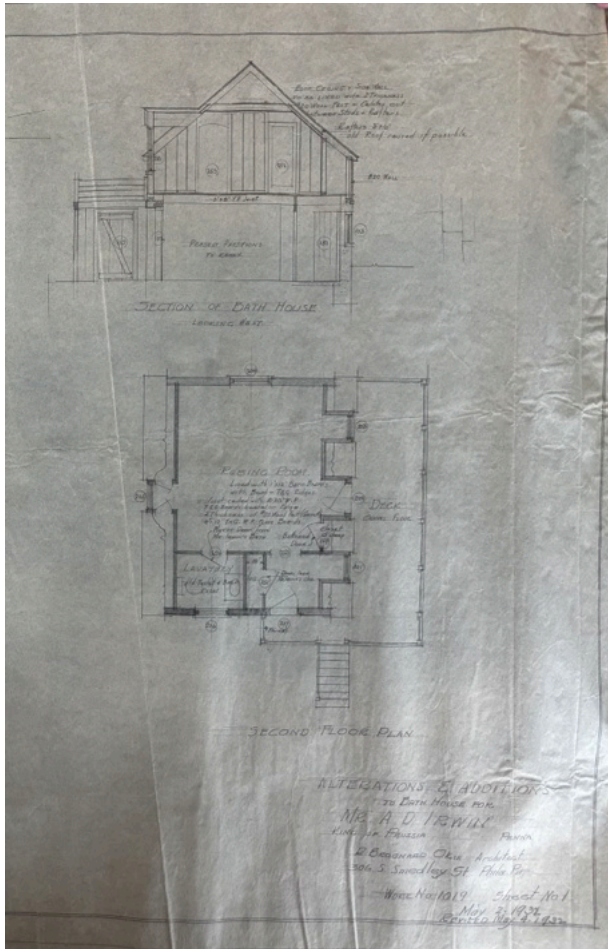


Fig. 24. Plans showing alterations of the bath house. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.



Fig. 25. The bath house, which is currently used as a maintenance facility for the office park surrounding Moore-Irwin. Current photo.

We do not know for sure when the four other structures on the property were added. Two are ruins. The third is a dovecote in remarkably good shape, and the fourth is a set of entrance walls (figs 26-30.)



Fig. 26. North side of the ruin northeast of the house. Current photo.



Fig. 27. South west side of the ruin northeast of the house. Current photo.



Fig. 28. South east side of the ruin northwest of the house. Current photo.



Fig. 29. Walls at the old entrance to the property on Moore Road, looking west. Current photo.



Fig. 30. North side of the dovecote northeast of the house. Current photo.

In 1935-1936, Irwin attempted to have Moore Road closed because it was being used as a “lover’s lane” and the sound of car engines running at all hours disturbed the family. The Valley Forge Park Commission and local residents successfully fought the move, leading Irwin to pay to have the road moved west, further away from the house (figs. 31 & 32.)

**Move to Close Lovers' Lane
Stirs Patriots' Opposition**

PETTING or patriotism? Turtle doves or traffic? Peculiar as the issue is, it has been placed right plump in the laps of a Montgomery county board of view, and on their decision rests the future of Moore rd., near Port Kennedy.

Moore rd., deposes Alexander D. Irwin, whose property in Upper Merion township it crosses, is nothing more nor less than a lovers' lane.

"Lovers of all descriptions" park on the road "during sleeping hours," according to Mr. Irwin, and make sleeping for the not-so-romantically inclined well-nigh to impossible. The stopping and starting of their motor cars is exceeding disturbing, he declares.

"On warm summer nights when the breeze is right one can also hear noises cooing," he adds.

Mr. Irwin's criticism of the road is contained in a petition which he has presented to the Montgomery County Court to have the thoroughfare closed. He is willing to pay a reasonable amount in possible damages for the action, he declared.

Opposing Mr. Irwin's petition are a group of residents of the community who, asserting that some of George Washington's troops used Moore rd., would like to have it improved. It is of historic importance, they say, although the nature of the use of the road by the men of the Revolution is not explained. By inference, they used it for marching rather than petting.

County officials assert that it would cost \$7500 to improve the road. So Judge Harold G. Knight has appointed a board of view to look into the matter.

Mr. Irwin has invited the board to make a traffic check on the road. He had a check made on a moonlight night, he said, finding that 15 automobiles entered the road. All of the cars—investigators used flashlights—were occupied exclusively by petters!

NAN DU
126 South 18

PRIOR TO
to our new store
we will close

Entire Win
at
GREATLY REDU

Fig. 31. Article detailing the controversy over Alexander Irwin's attempt to close Moore Road in the Philadelphia Inquirer, January 1, 1936. Accessed at Newspapers.com: <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-philadelphia-inquirer-1936-01-01-inq/141784411/>



Fig. 32. Irwin's property, showing the old route of Moore Road in dotted outline. Plate 29 of the 1955 Franklin Property Atlas of Upper Merion. From the King of Prussia Historical Society Archives.

In 1946, the servants quarters were again enlarged. Although Okie died on December 27, 1945, the plans for the work were among the R. Brognard Architectural Papers at the Pennsylvania State Archives. The last version of the plans in the collection were drawn by Okie September 22, 1945, only three months before his death (fig. 33.) We surmise that the work was completed by Okie's son Charles.



Fig. 33. Plans showing the enlargement of the servants quarters on the east side of the house, dated Sept. 22, 1945. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

The enlarged servant's quarters enhanced the additive style that Okie was known for (figs. 34 & 35.)



Fig. 34. The north and east side of the house, looking southwest. On the left is the 1946 east side addition to the servants quarters, with the connector just visible with siding. Current photo.



Fig. 35. The south and east side of the house, looking northwest. On the right is the 1946 east side addition to the servants quarters. Current photo.

Also visible are dormer windows that break the roofline - another common Okie design element. Most of the 1946 construction followed Okie's 1945 designs (Figs. 36-39.)



Fig. 36. Detail of fig. 35, showing the north face of the servant's quarters. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

Fig. 37. The north face of the servants quarters as actually built. Current photo.



Fig. 38. Detail of fig. 35, showing the east face of the servant's quarters. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.

Fig. 39. The east face of the servants quarters as built, although one window was later altered by Upper Merion Township to create an emergency exit in the 1970s. The stairs that led from the door to the ground have since been removed. Current photo.

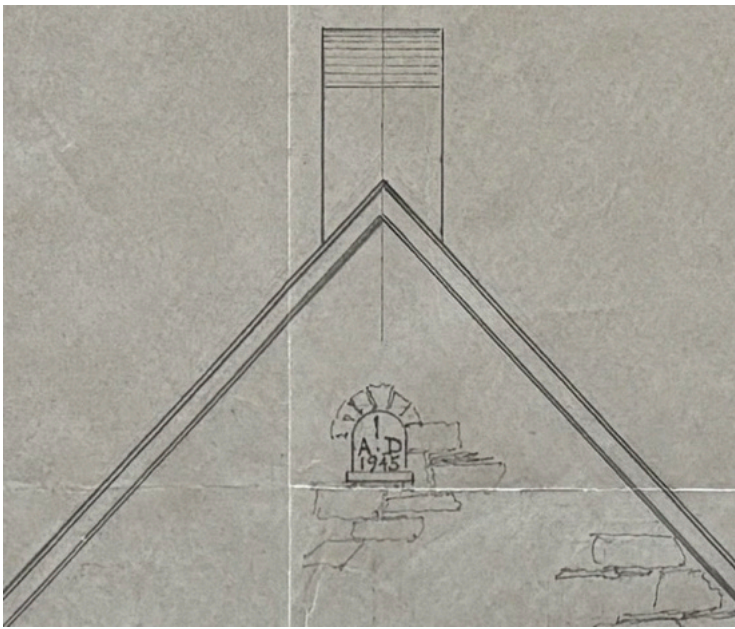


Fig. 40. Detail of fig. 35, showing the date stone. From the R. Brognard Okie Architectural Papers. Photographed at the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg.



Fig. 41. The date stone as it currently appears, surrounded by rough stucco that was added much later.. Current photo.

Given that these are servant's quarters, there are no extensive built-in cabinetry, cupboards or drawers, however other elements typical of Okie's work are present such as antique hardware and rounded corners (figs. 42-44.)

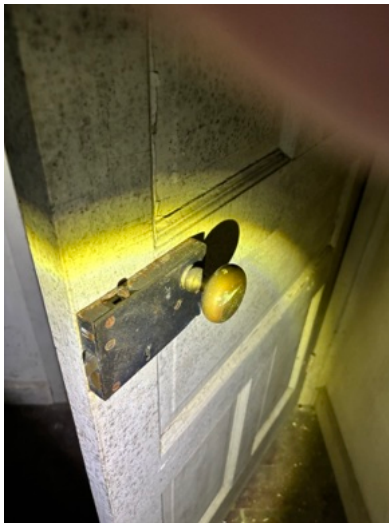


Fig. 42. Antique doorknob and lock mechanism in the servants quarters upstairs. From the archives of the King of Prussia Historical Society.



Fig. 43. Antique door latch in the servants quarters upstairs. From the archives of the King of Prussia Historical Society..



Fig. 44. Rounded ceiling in the servants quarters upstairs. From the archives of the King of Prussia Historical Society..

Part of Alexander Irwin's land was sold off to the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission; the turnpike was completed up to the Valley Forge exit in October of 1950. In 1957, the house and the land around it was sold to Cabot, Cabot and Forbes which developed much of the land into an office park. In 1968, the Upper Merion Cultural Center was allowed to move into the house, although without a lease. In 1972, Upper Merion Township purchased the house and the surrounding 4.8 acres for \$100,000. The Upper Merion Township Parks and Recreation Department moved into the building soon thereafter. Some modifications were made including fluorescent lighting and emergency exits and a stucco on mesh exterior that is currently in the process of falling away. The stucco over stone underneath seems to be completely intact (figs. 45-49.) Upper Merion Township recently placed a tarp over the side in order to contain the falling pieces for safety purposes. Also at some point, the windows were replaced by a well-meaning township supervisor who hoped to stop water leaks.



Fig. 45. The east side of the house, showing the emergency exit and stairs (since removed) from the servants quarters second floor. Photo by Dave Broida in 1979.



Fig. 46. The east side of the house, showing the emergency exit from the servants quarters second floor. Current photo.

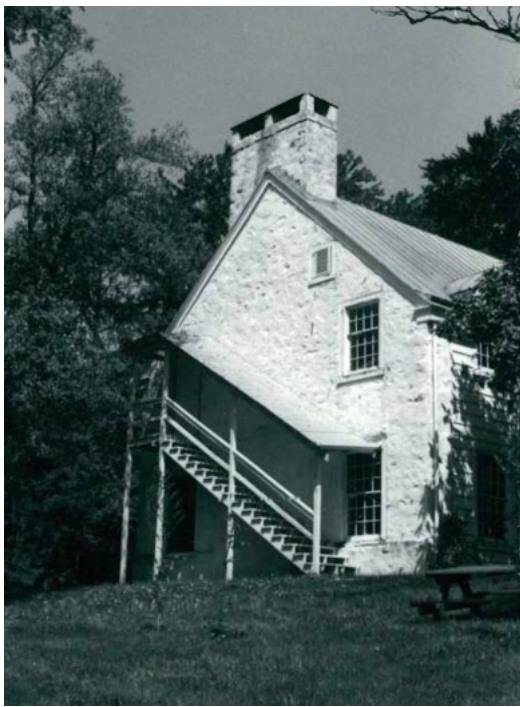


Fig. 47. The south side of the 1932 Okie addition, showing the emergency exit and stairs (since removed) from the servants quarters second floor. Photo by Dave Broida in 1979.



Fig. 48. The south side of the 1932 Okie addition, showing the emergency exit from the second floor. Current photo.



Fig. 49. The southwest corner of the 1932 Okie addition showing the falling away of the stucco on mesh, revealing the intact original stucco on stone.

From the time the house was sold in 1957 to now, the house has been allowed to fall into disrepair. By 1992, Upper Merion Parks & Recreation moved out of the house due to deterioration. But given the long period of neglect, the house is in remarkably stable condition. Murray Associates Architects and Whitney Bailey Cox & Magnani Structural Engineers submitted a facility condition and stabilization assessment in 2021 (included as a separate attachment.) Their main recommendations for immediate structural repairs are roof and roof frame replacement, and delamination of the stucco on mesh.

The house is surrounded by the Silas Burgess Arboretum, recently restored by the Upper Merion Shade Tree Commission with grants from the Upper Merion Board of Community Assistance. It is a class 1 arboretum with more than one champion tree, contributing with Trout Creek to a remarkably beautiful setting. The surrounding trees shelter the house and grounds visually and auditorially so that one would not know that it is in the midst of a busy office park in the middle of a highly developed King of Prussia commercial zone (figs. 6 & 7.)



Fig. 6. View of the northwest corner of the house looking south, showing the surrounding trees. Current photo.



Fig. 7. View from the southeast corner of the house looking southwest, showing the surrounding trees and Trout Creek. Current photo.