

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Annaburg  
Other names/site number: Manassas Manor; Annaburg Manor; Portner House; Portner Mansion; DHR #155-0021  
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

## 2. Location

Street & number: 9201 Maple Street  
City or town: Manassas State: VA County: Independent City  
Not For Publication:  N/A Vicinity:  N/A

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A \_\_\_ B X C \_\_\_ D

	<u>3-1-2022</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

##### Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC / single dwelling

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT / NOT IN USE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS: Neo-Classical Revival

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: STONE / Brownstone, Slate; BRICK; WOOD

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

Annaburg is a three-story Neo-Classical Revival house, with a below-grade basement and attic space, located in Manassas, Virginia, and owned by the City of Manassas. Built between 1892 and 1894, it was used as a private residence until the early 1920s, then left vacant until 1964 when it was converted to a nursing home. The nursing home closed in 2007 and the building was again left vacant and boarded up by the previous owner until it was acquired by the City of Manassas in 2019. The building is constructed with both locally made brick and locally sourced brownstone. There is a large, tiled landing that extends out from the front of the house that was originally part of a wraparound porch. Multiple hand-carved brownstone columns are arranged in a semicircle around the front door, supporting a second-story balcony. Wood-framed windows are installed on the front and rear facades, around the third floor, and in the attic dormers. The sloped roof has a small flat-roofed section at the peak. There are extensive original decorative moldings and trim, constructed of both stone and metal, adorning various areas of the roof. Likewise, the building's interior features exuberant decorative elements such as classically-inspired niches, multiple-part window trim and crown molding, ornate fireplace mantels, and built-in shelving. The house was designed by architect Gustav Friebus (1813-1912), who served as chief draftsman in the Engineer's Office for the Washington Monument. It is located on 3.6 acres of parkland adjoined by suburban residential housing constructed primarily in the early- to mid-1950s and, immediately to the northeast, an assisted living facility constructed in 1988. The dwelling's elaborate façade and character-defining exterior and interior ornamentation are remarkably intact, despite the building's lack of use from the 1920s to 1964 and its subsequent adaptive reuse as a nursing home. Although the property's setting has been altered by dense development on all sides, the building remains on a verdant lawn with landscaping and a formal

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entrance drive. Integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, therefore, have been maintained.

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## **Narrative Description**

### **Site Description**

Originally part of a 2,000-acre estate, Annaburg today is situated within a suburban environment in the historic city of Manassas, Virginia, thirty miles west of Washington, D. C. It sits on what remains of Robert Portner's vast holdings, a 7.4-acre block on the edge of the Annaburg and Liberia subdivisions and surrounded by residential neighborhoods to the east, west, and south, and commercial development to the north. The block has been divided in half, with Annaburg being situated on the southern portion, while the Caton Merchant House Assisted Living Facility occupies the northern half of the block. With the exception of the mansion, historic entrance drive, and a small parking lot in the southeastern corner, the rest of the 3.6-acre property is an open park with a scattering of mature deciduous trees and a double row of evergreen trees that frame the location of the estate's original drive. These evergreens are visible in period photographs of the estate and are believed to have been planted around the time of the manor house's construction.

### **Architectural Description**

#### **Exterior**

Annaburg was built as the summer residence of millionaire beer baron Robert Portner (1837-1906) and designed by Washington, D. C.-based architect Gustav Friebus (1813-1912), who combined elements of some of Portner's favorite European mansions in his design. The house is a two-story, five-bay residence with a complex, multiple-gable roof, and a centered, pedimented bay composed of distinctive brownstone with a denticulated cornice. The house features four interior brick chimneys and sits on a stone foundation composed of rusticated blocks. Other notable features include a façade dominated by a large half-circle portico supported by seven Ionic columns, a wide frieze with an urn and swag design on the entry porch, stone lintels with fluted keystones above the windows, rusticated stone corner quoins, and a pressed-metal cornice with both modillions and dentils that encircles the entire building. Of note, however, is that the original wraparound porches, a porte-cochere, and a semi-circular porch all were removed during the 1960s when the building was converted to a nursing home. Despite these losses, the dwelling retains many of its historic features that include character-defining elements of the Neo-Classical Revival style.

Sheltered by the semi-circular porch, the centered entry, with a replacement door and single-light, round-arched transom, is flanked by two large windows featuring multiple-light windows, single-light transoms, and fluted pilasters. To the left (northwest) of the entry is an elaborate Palladian window with a six-over-six double hung window flanked by two small somewhat narrow one-over-one windows. Similar to the entry, this window is framed by ornate molding and topped with a semicircular window. Southeast of the entry bay are two windows with six-over-six, double-hung sash, a single-pane transom, and a stone lintel with fluted keystone.

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The northwest and southeast (side) elevations are identical with the exception of a below-grade entry to the basement on the south elevation. Both elevations have been painted white, including all window surrounds and trim. Each elevation features three bays and a centered, slightly projecting bay topped with one large gable front dormer flanked by two smaller gable front dormers. The projecting bay houses two large windows with the rest of the fenestration made up of smaller single windows. All of the windows have been covered with plywood and all are topped with fluted keystones. Although painted and somewhat difficult to distinguish, stone quoins are at each corner of both elevations. During the 1960s, when this building was converted into a nursing home, three-story wings were added to each elevation; these have since been removed and the fenestration pattern on each wall is largely unchanged, but for what may be one walled-over window at the south corner of the southeast elevation.

The northeast (rear) elevation, also painted white, features a large gable front dormer with two sets of three windows, surmounted by an oculus with stone surround. The fenestration of the first and second stories is varied and features an asymmetrical layout. Most windows are singles with the exception of one left-of-center Palladian window with segmental-arched transoms on the second story. The sash have six-over-six lights. Stone quoins are at each corner.

One of the more unique features of the exterior was the inclusion of Anna Portner's family crest, carved out of brownstone, and still visible on the east side of the house. Its original placement along this wall was a particularly deliberate choice. While on a two-year trip to Germany, Portner commissioned a portrait of his family, which measured twelve feet wide by nine feet tall. When Annaburg was designed, this room and wall were laid out with the family portrait in mind – hence the crest and no windows.

### **Interior**

The first floor of Annaburg contains nine rooms flanking a large central hall, which historically included a dining room, adjacent butler's pantry, music or game room, east and west parlors, a ballroom with three sets of doors that opened up to the large porch, and a water closet. An adjacent hallway led to a central staircase and a back door. There are remnants of a second staircase for servants, which led from the attic to the basement, but was removed during the dwelling's conversion into a nursing home. The first floor remains virtually unchanged from the time the Portner family was in residence, with the exception of a wall that was built during the nursing home era that partially obscures the stairwell. This wall was installed as a required smoke control for the rooms and floors above. Given the quality of the wood and matching detailed trim, it is believed that the door frame and transom window used in this wall were repurposed from another space in the mansion.

The elaborate details of the exterior are continued in the interior, especially in the first-floor center hall and parlors. Ionic columns flank the entries of both parlors, fluted pilasters wrap the corners of the rooms, and multiple-part crown molding with acanthus leaves encircles each of the rooms. Mantels in these three front rooms are all ornate and exhibit Neo-Classical Revival embellishments. The parlor mantels are identical and feature an intricately carved frieze with

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brackets and a mirrored overmantel flanked by two slender, turned, full-height colonettes. The mantel in the center hall features paired columns, an intricately carved frieze with swags and cornice with dentils, and a mirrored overmantel divided by engaged, fluted pilasters and topped with a rounded arch that echoes the primary entry's arched transom.

Opposite the center hall's fireplace is a round-arched niche surrounded by fluted pilasters and an arch with keystone, with a painted wainscot and paneling surmounted by a clamshell motif. Flanking doors to the rear of the building have classically-derived casing with engaged pilasters and cornices with dentil. The north parlor features two inset bookshelves along the north wall, each with identical columned surrounds topped with a full entablature with dentils. Original wood flooring has been uncovered in both of the parlors and while the center hall currently has replacement flooring, it is believed the original wood flooring is still extant here as well.

The second and third floors of Annaburg have undergone the most changes since the Portner era, when they were used as bedrooms for the parents and daughters (second floor), and sons and servants (third floor).<sup>1</sup> After almost four decades of vacancy, John Kennedy Sills purchased the mansion in 1960 with the sole purpose of converting the building into a nursing home. Given the house's state of considerable disrepair, it was decided to rehabilitate the second floor into private apartments for nursing home residents while the third floor was used as staff office space. Original floor plans for the house have not been located so it is difficult to determine just how much was altered and how many changes were made to these floors, although field investigations suggest the modifications were fairly extensive.

Contemporary newspaper accounts during the Portner years make reference to the house having indoor plumbing and electrical lighting, and is said to have contained three bathrooms – a water closet on the ground floor and two full bathrooms of varying size on the second and third floors. The one room that appears to be relatively unchanged on the second floor is the central room on the front side of the house, which exited out onto a projecting semi-circular porch. In all probability, this was a sitting room while the bedrooms on either side originally would have been bedrooms for Robert and Anna Portner. Though it is barren now, it is also believed that this projecting semi-circular porch was surfaced with either slate or brownstone tiles similar to what has been found on the first-story porch.

The fundamental structure of the basement remains the same. Limited architectural evidence remains from when it was refitted during the nursing home's occupancy for use as a beauty salon, kitchen and snack bar, pharmacy, and storage. It is logical to think that a kitchen was located in the northwest corner of the basement, directly below the dining room, as there is suggestive evidence of a dumb waiter having previously connected the two rooms. It can also be surmised that the basement contained a wash room, pantry or food storage, and even an ice box given the inclusion of Portner's air conditioning system into the design of the home, as well as a mechanical room for this system.

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<sup>1</sup> Thumbnail, 1.

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### **Integrity Statement**

In the forty years it stood abandoned, the house suffered significant damage. After the Portners ceased using the estate in the 1920s, people entered the house at different times and took easily removed elements such as brass fittings, copper pipes in the walls, and other pieces of metal. The majority of this damage happened during World War II-era scrap metal drives. Local residents also recount seeing the first floor being used to store bales of hay in the 1950s. The east and west elevations suffered additional damage when the building was converted into a nursing home and the building's wraparound porches, a porte-cochere, and a semi-circular porch were removed. Any protruding, rusticated stone was broken off, multiple holes were cut into the walls, and some metal decorative elements were removed or severely damaged when three-story brick wings were added to the sides of the house. The most significant and longest-lasting damage, however, came from the decision to paint the exterior white. As an extremely porous material, brownstone needs to be able to breathe and being continuously painted for nearly sixty years trapped moisture inside the stone, causing it to spall, break apart, and disintegrate. The brownstone had also absorbed the white paint, making its removal especially difficult. When the nursing home wings were removed, the exposed east and west sides were also painted white to match the rest of the building.

The interior of the house suffered damage from the time the nursing home facility closed in 2007 to the present due to weathering and deferred maintenance. Since acquiring the property, the City of Manassas has replaced the roofing with an authentic blue-gray Vermont slate. The choice of slate was based on shards of the original roofing found in the attic. New wooden box gutters were constructed and installed along with metal downspouts. The original, intact, pressed-metal cornice has been removed, painstakingly cleaned and repainted and reinstalled. Other small sections that need to be replaced are identified and documented. The City of Manassas also remediated both mold and asbestos that was rampant throughout the house but most particularly in the basement. A historic structures report is in the process of being completed and will outline additional restoration and rehabilitation recommendations.

Despite the changes to Annaburg over the years, the house retains sufficient integrity for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The house remains in its original location and, although its setting has changed with the development of a surrounding residential neighborhood and construction of a nursing facility to the rear of the house, there are still several acres of the green space that surround the building, indicative of the original and historic landscape of the property. As described above, the house retains many important aspects of its original design, workmanship, form, and massing. Annaburg is noted for its use of local materials, which add to its distinctive design and allude to Robert Portner's varied business interests. Integrity of feeling and association are lessened by some of the changes made during the property's transition to a nursing facility, but both are still evident because of the monumentality of the Neo-Classical Revival design and the finely executed and elaborate details found on both the exterior and interior of the building.



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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1892-1894

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Friebus, Gustav (architect)

Cannon, John (builder)

Muddiman, David (builder)

Newman, Oliver E. (painter/muralist)

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Originally constructed between 1892 and 1894 on a 2,000-acre estate in a then-rural area, Annaburg was the summer residence of German brewer, inventor, and prominent figure of the time, Robert Portner (1837-1906). A Neo-Classical Revival style building, it was designed by Washington, D. C.-based architect Gustav Friebus (1813-1912) and was outfitted with electricity, indoor plumbing and mechanical air conditioning by the time of completion. The air conditioning system was unique and based on Portner's method of cooling the air in his brewery, which he patented in 1880 (No. 299,750, *Process of and Apparatus for Cooling Air*). The design of Annaburg was crafted using elements from Portner's favorite European mansions and the military academy of his youth, and applied within a Neo-Classical Revival vernacular. The building's architectural design and the inclusion of the modern technological advancements available at the time combine to make Annaburg significant at the local level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. The period of significance is 1892-94, to coincide with the years of construction. Following the death of Paul Portner, the last Portner resident, the manor house was generally left vacant and fell into great disrepair. With suburban sprawl proliferating rapidly, the quality of the area changed. The Portners sold the entire 2,000-acre property to a local developer in 1947. The former estate was gradually subdivided and redeveloped largely with residential neighborhoods. During the early 1960s, the manor house was renovated and converted for use as a nursing home. Secondary to the dwelling's architectural significance is its history as a hub for social events. Robert Portner is known to have opened up his home and estate to the public for a variety of community events, which, when combined with the many contributions and bequests he made over the course of his lifetime, created a lasting legacy not only in Manassas but also in northern Virginia during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **Historical Background**

In 1883, Alexandria beer brewer Robert Portner purchased the estate of the late Christian Mathis.<sup>2</sup> Located on the outskirts of Manassas, Virginia, a small post-Civil War farming community thirty miles west of Washington, D. C., Mathis's estate had previously been a part of a 1,660-acre parcel known as the Bull Run Tract, first patented in 1732. By 1891, Portner had enlarged his estate to 1,200 acres, and the existing Mathis-built house had become too small for the Portner family, necessitating construction of a new home in 1892.<sup>3</sup>

Though there is no evidence to support one over the other, it is believed that Portner named the estate for both his wife, Anna, and the military academy he attended in his youth. The three-story, Neo-Classical Revival house was built between 1892 and 1894 using brownstone obtained from a

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<sup>2</sup> Prince William County, Virginia, Deed Book 33: 557.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 34: 397; 34: 412; 35: 113, 440, 592; 36: 56; 37: 59; 38: 243, 454, 466; 39: 406.

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local quarry in which Portner owned an interest (formerly known as the Mayfield Brown Stone Quarry), and locally made, light-colored brick. This same quarry provided material for a number of buildings in Manassas, as well as for several of Portner's real estate ventures in Alexandria, Virginia, and Washington, D. C.

At its height, the Annaburg estate encompassed a total of 2,157 acres, which extended from today's Main Street in Manassas to the banks of Bull Run.<sup>4</sup> The property comprised the majority of the Weir family's Liberia farm and the McLean family's Yorkshire farm. Both of these large estates played important and historic roles in the Civil War, Yorkshire being most notably where the first Battle of Bull Run began. While most of the estate was used as a working farm, where Portner raised cattle, horses, and operated a full dairy operation on the Liberia farm, his farming pursuits were not limited to livestock. In addition to the Mathis orchards, Portner cultivated a vineyard that produced award-winning wines<sup>5</sup> and even attempted growing hops for his brewery. Annaburg was not without its pleasures either. Portner set aside between two and three hundred acres for a fenced-in deer park where he often hosted hunting parties. The twenty acres surrounding the mansion were designed to be pleasure grounds for strolling and public enjoyment and the trees which remain, some of which frame the location of the estate's original entrance drive as well as a circular garden (now a drive), are believed to have been planted around 1890-1895. It has been said that trees planted on the estate included imports from all forty-four states in the United States at the time (providing they could grow in Virginia's climate) as well as from foreign lands that included Japanese maples from Asia and Black Firs from the Black Forest of Germany.<sup>6</sup>

## **Architecture**

The architect for Annaburg was Gustav Friebus (1813-1912), who immigrated to the United States in 1848. Like Portner, a Prussian and Mason who lived in Washington, D. C., Friebus already had a notable career, first serving as chief draftsman in the Engineer's Office for the Washington Monument, and later designing several prominent residences in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington.<sup>7</sup> To oversee the construction of his new home, Portner hired local builder John Cannon. Cannon came from a family of carpenters, including his father Frank and son Ira, who were responsible for the construction of a large number of buildings in Manassas and known for their high quality of work. The cornerstone of the new house, bearing the inscription "R. P. 1892" was laid in April of 1892, and work was completed by December of 1894 at a total cost of \$150,000. In addition to Cannon, Portner hired stonemason David Muddiman to handle the more decorative stone carving, using the stone from the local quarry in which he owned an interest.<sup>8</sup> He also had all of the brick made in Manassas<sup>9</sup> and hired locally renowned painter Oliver Newman to

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<sup>4</sup> Prince William County, Virginia, Deed Book 41: 90, 169, 338; 44: 114, 132; 46: 301, 438.

<sup>5</sup> Olszewski, 78.

<sup>6</sup> Killmer, 2; Annaburg Revisited, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Barton, 259.

<sup>8</sup> Journal Messenger, May 8, 1869.

<sup>9</sup> Evening Star, April 17, 1894.

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handle all interior painting, which included several frescoes on the ceilings.<sup>10</sup> The more refined architectural elements of the house he had shipped from Europe, including Italian marble fireplace mantles and ornamental statuary from Greece.<sup>11</sup>

Popular interest in and revival of the classically-inspired styles, such as Georgian, Federal and Greek Revival, that began in the United States from the late-eighteenth through mid-nineteenth century gained even more momentum with the 1893 Columbian World Exposition in Chicago. The Neo-Classical Revival style, whether used for public buildings or private residences, represented a departure from the eclectic and ornate Victorian-era Italianate, Second Empire, Stick, Queen Anne, and Romanesque Revival styles and the antebellum builder-designed houses based on motifs found in pattern books. Annaburg is an excellent example of the Neo-Classical Revival style as designed by an accomplished architect and executed using local materials. Character-defining exterior features include a façade dominated by a projecting, pedimented central bay composed of distinctive brownstone, a large half-circle portico supported by seven Ionic columns, a wide frieze with an urn and swag design on the entry porch, stone lintels with keystones above the windows, rusticated stonework such as corner quoins, two Palladian windows, and a pressed-metal cornice with both modillions and dentils that encircles the entire building. Similarly elaborate ornamentation exists in the interior, particularly the first-story central hall and flanking parlors. Ionic columns highlight the entries to both parlors, fluted pilasters wrap the corners of the rooms, and multiple-part crown molding with acanthus leaves encircles each of the rooms. Fireplace mantels in these three front rooms are all ornate with elaborate moldings, columns and decorative friezes. Although the upper stories have been modified somewhat and the exterior stonework has been damaged by paint and trapped moisture, Annaburg retains the monumentality that distinguished it during the Portner family's ownership. The dwelling is an excellent example of Neo-Classical Revival architecture, making it locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture.

### **Additional Significant Design Details**

To build his new country house with the height of modern amenities, Portner spared no expense to include every technological advancement available at the time. Though it frightened many people at first, electricity was of no concern to Portner. In January 1886, he ordered electric lights from the Consolidated Electric Light Company of New York to be installed at his brewery in Alexandria. When the system went live two months later, the brewery became the first establishment in the city – residential, commercial, or industrial – to be electrified.<sup>12</sup> Though there are no known contemporary accounts of an electrical system being installed during Annaburg's construction, the first reference to it appeared less than a year after the house was built. "An electric and gas plant supplies the house with light and the whole is the handiwork of Mr. Portner's two sons [Robbie and Eddie], who are studying electrical engineering and have a decided taste and

<sup>10</sup> Manassas Journal, April 8, 1910.

<sup>11</sup> Diary of Robert Portner.

<sup>12</sup> Alexandria Gazette, January 11, 1886, and March 9, 1886.

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talent for it.”<sup>13</sup> Electrifying the estate was a big enough undertaking that Portner had a fully operational powerhouse built for this purpose, which was two stories in height and constructed with the same materials as Annaburg. With regard to indoor plumbing, an article from the *Alexandria Gazette* dated August 8, 1894, confirms its inclusion at Annaburg and identifies its installers as Messrs. J. A. and W. W. Cogan.<sup>14</sup>

Being a tinkerer and inventor, Portner looked at life from both practical and technological views, and was incredibly forward-thinking. He would often study technological innovations and advancements at other breweries by purchasing models of these machines. He disassembled the models to see how they worked and then studied them to figure out how they could be improved upon. This was how he created his two inventions, Direct Ammonia Expansion (1878) and Process of and Apparatus for Cooling Air (1881), the latter of which he used to cool and purify the air in his brewery. Though design of a brewery was itself relatively uniform in its overall layout (i.e. fermenting tubs on upper floors), the architecture was generally suited to its particular location and purpose, something Portner acknowledged in his patent when he noted that, “details of construction and arrangement of parts may be varied to suit different circumstances and different users.”<sup>15</sup> It is commonly accepted that when Portner built Annaburg, he installed a mechanical air conditioning system in the house, though no plans for this exact system have been found. Looking at the accompanying diagram for his air cooling and purifying patent, however, one can see how it could be easily adapted for use in a private residence. In the diagram, large blocks of ice were stored in an underground chamber next to the building. Air cooled by the ice would flow into and through the basement level room before traveling to upper floors through strategically placed vents in the floors. After traveling through the upper floor, the air would pass over pipes that would draw moisture from the air, a function intended to remove germs in keeping with the then-emerging germ theory of public health. The pipes were a double-bodied system with a refrigerant in the inner pipes and a non-congealable liquid in the outer pipes. A fan would then force the cleansed air back down to the basement and back over the ice to start the process all over again.

When Frances Jones surveyed Annaburg for the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in 1980, she noted a single-story outbuilding that measured 25 feet by 25 feet and stood approximately 100 feet behind Annaburg, as well as the foundations of two other outbuildings of similar size nearby. (The outbuilding noted in 1980 was demolished in 1985 to make room for the construction of the Caton Merchant House assisted living facility northeast of Annaburg.) Jones theorized that the outbuilding was a powerhouse or potting shed, though contemporary newspaper accounts described the estate’s powerhouse as being two stories tall. Instead, it is possible that the building was used as an above-ground icehouse for Portner’s air conditioning system. Local residents had described an icehouse near the mansion, fitted with sawdust-insulated walls, and used to store large blocks of ice harvested from the estate’s ponds during the winter months. Further evidence of this climate-control system comes from local residents’ accounts and maintenance workers at the nursing home, who recall seeing brick shafts or flues within the walls. Portner’s grandson and namesake, Robert Portner III, who was later a resident of the

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, September 2, 1895.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, August 8, 1894, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> US Patent 229,750 (1880), p. 2.

Annaburg  
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Manassas/Annaburg Manor nursing home, gave testimony to the air conditioning system, remarking, “You noticed it as soon as you stepped in the front door; it was like an icebox.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Conclusion**

After Robert Portner’s death in 1906, his family continued to entertain at Annaburg and operate it as a successful farm. In 1911, Manassas hosted the Peace Jubilee to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Battle of Bull Run. President William Howard Taft was the speaker for the event, and was later a guest of honor, along with Virginia Governor William H. Mann, at a luncheon at Annaburg served by Anna Portner.<sup>17</sup> This is not surprising given that Taft’s daughter Helen and the Portners’ youngest daughter Elsa were close friends. Taft was not the only President to visit the estate, either. In 1902, while visiting the home of Rep. John F. Rixey, President Theodore Roosevelt visited the estate while inspecting different points of interest on the local battlefields (inclement weather prevented him from attending a luncheon at the Portner home).<sup>18</sup>

Anna Portner died at Annaburg in 1912, and the house was alternately lived in by various children over the next decade. Following the death of Paul Portner in 1919, use of the house declined precipitously, and shortly after Oscar Portner’s death in 1924 a large auction was held to sell the remaining contents of the home. From this point forward, the family rarely visited the estate, if at all, although it was still used for public events, most notably the Piedmont Dairy Festival from 1930 to 1936. In February 1947, the remaining heirs sold Annaburg to local developer I. J. “Jack” Breeden for \$215,000.<sup>19</sup> The estate was gradually subdivided and developed, and in 1960 the 7.4-acre parcel which contained the mansion was sold to John Kennedy Sills.<sup>20</sup> Sills built three-story wings on the side elevations of the mansion and reconfigured the upper floors into private apartments, all of which culminated in the opening of the Manassas Manor nursing home five years later. Sills sold the facility to the Prince William Hospital in 1979,<sup>21</sup> when it was renamed Annaburg Manor. The hospital continued to operate the facility until 2005, at which time the nursing home was closed and replaced by two separate facilities. Two years later, the 1960s three-story nursing home wings were demolished, leaving the house freestanding for the first time in nearly fifty years. In 2018, the hospital system sold the vacant and unused building and 3.65 acres of land to the City of Manassas.

To the residents of Manassas, the Portner family represented the physical embodiment of wealth many had not seen before. Prior to the Civil War, the area that would become Manassas had many well-to-do families – the Chinns, Johnsons, and Weirs, to name a few – but they represented a landed gentry that was decimated by the war and the abolition of slavery. Robert Portner came from relatively humble beginnings, immigrated to the United States with no money in his pockets,

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<sup>16</sup> Killmer, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Baltimore Sun, July 22, 1911.

<sup>18</sup> Alexandria Gazette, November 3, 1902.

<sup>19</sup> Prince William County, Virginia, Deed Book 125: 487.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 265: 552.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 1062: 147

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and worked hard to establish himself and his business empire. His brewery, started as a side business to his grocery store, grew to become the largest brewery in the South and was held up alongside industry titans like Anheuser-Busch and Pabst. He worked tirelessly to constantly improve and enlarge his brewery until it became the largest industry in Alexandria and a standard of modernity. Being that many residents of Manassas were immigrants to the area themselves, Portner represented traits that these people could relate and even aspire to, and his many generous bequests to the town only helped endear him to them. He donated the funds and resources for at least one town well, the first paved street, and multiple buildings to be constructed. He also left a bequest in his will to establish a fund for the indigent of Manassas, with a directive that one-third of it be used specifically for the African-American community. Numerous newspaper accounts document dances and other public festivities on the grounds, and many residents of Manassas recalled going ice skating on the estate's pond in the winter months. Portner also allowed local churches to use his ponds for baptisms.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cardwell, 19.



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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Annaburg  
Name of Property

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Name of repository: Manassas Museum, Manassas Virginia; Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** DHR #155-0021

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### 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** 3.65 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NAD 1983 StatePlane Virginia North  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                        |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.755950 | Longitude: -77.469271 |
| 2. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 3. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 4. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |

**Or**

#### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927    or     NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

#### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The historic boundary is coterminous with the perimeter lines of tax parcel 101/10 3A/ A1//, as recorded by the City of Manassas, Virginia. The true and correct boundary is shown on the attached Tax Parcel Map obtained from the City of Manassas Tax Records on July 20, 2021, and the attached Sketch Map/ Photo Key which has a bar scale of 1"=200'.

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**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The historic boundary encompasses the entirety of the parcel on which the house is currently situated, on acreage that represents the last intact piece of the formerly 2,000-acre Annaburg estate. All known associated historic resources, as well as what remains of the historic setting, are encompassed by the historic boundary.

When I. J. Breeden began developing and subdividing the estate, the first neighborhood he laid out was the Annaburg subdivision, located within the formal park of Annaburg and closest to the main entrance to the estate. He laid out plots along the streets surrounding the manor house, but carved out a 7.4 acre block around the house itself. When it was sold to John K. Sills in 1960, this became the boundary for the Manassas Manor (later Annaburg Manor) nursing home. When Novant Health Systems sold the half of the property with the manor house to the City of Manassas, the dividing line was drawn through the middle of the property, thus bringing Annaburg's parcel to its current size and boundaries.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Michael B. Gaines

organization: \_\_\_\_\_

street & number: 7500 Turkey Trot Drive

city or town: Stanley state: North Carolina zip code: 28164

e-mail: mbgaines1977@gmail.com

telephone: (267) 386-6224

date: December 1, 2021

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo

Annaburg  
Name of Property

City of Manassas, VA  
County and State

date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Annaburg  
City or Vicinity: Manassas, Virginia  
County: Independent City State: Virginia  
Photographer: Mary Helen Dellinger, Manassas Museum, except as noted  
Date Photographed: July-August 2021

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 1 of 20. Façade, southwest elevation, camera facing northeast

Photo 2 of 20. Northwest elevation, location of original porte-cochere, camera facing east.

Photo 3 of 20. Rear or Northeast elevation, camera facing southwest.

Photo 4 of 20. Southeast elevation, camera facing northwest.

Photo 5 of 20. Northwest lawn, camera facing northeast.

Photo 6 of 20. West lawn, camera facing east.

Photo 7 of 20. East lawn, camera facing west.

Photo 8 of 20. Southeast lawn and landscaping, camera facing north.

Photo 9 of 20. Southwest entrance drive to the building, camera facing northeast.

Photo 10 of 20. South parlor, camera facing east.

Photo 11 of 20. Center hall, camera facing north.

Photo 12 of 20. Center hall, detail of niche, camera facing west.  
Photographer: Aubrey Von Lindern

Photo 13 of 20. Center hall, fireplace, camera facing south.

Photo 14 of 20. North parlor, camera facing west.

Photo 15 of 20. North parlor, fireplace, camera facing southwest.  
Photographer: Aubrey Von Lindern

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Photo 16 of 20. North parlor, detail of fireplace, camera facing northwest.  
Photographer: Aubrey Von Lindern

Photo 17 of 20. North parlor, built-in shelving, camera facing west.  
Photographer: Aubrey Von Lindern

Photo 18 of 20. Detail of window and door trim and crown molding in entrance hall.  
Photographer: Aubrey Von Lindern

Photo 19 of 20. Staircase from first to second floor.  
Photographer: Aubrey Von Lindern

Photo 20 of 20. Representative view of built-in shelving and cabinets.  
Photographer: Aubrey Von Lindern

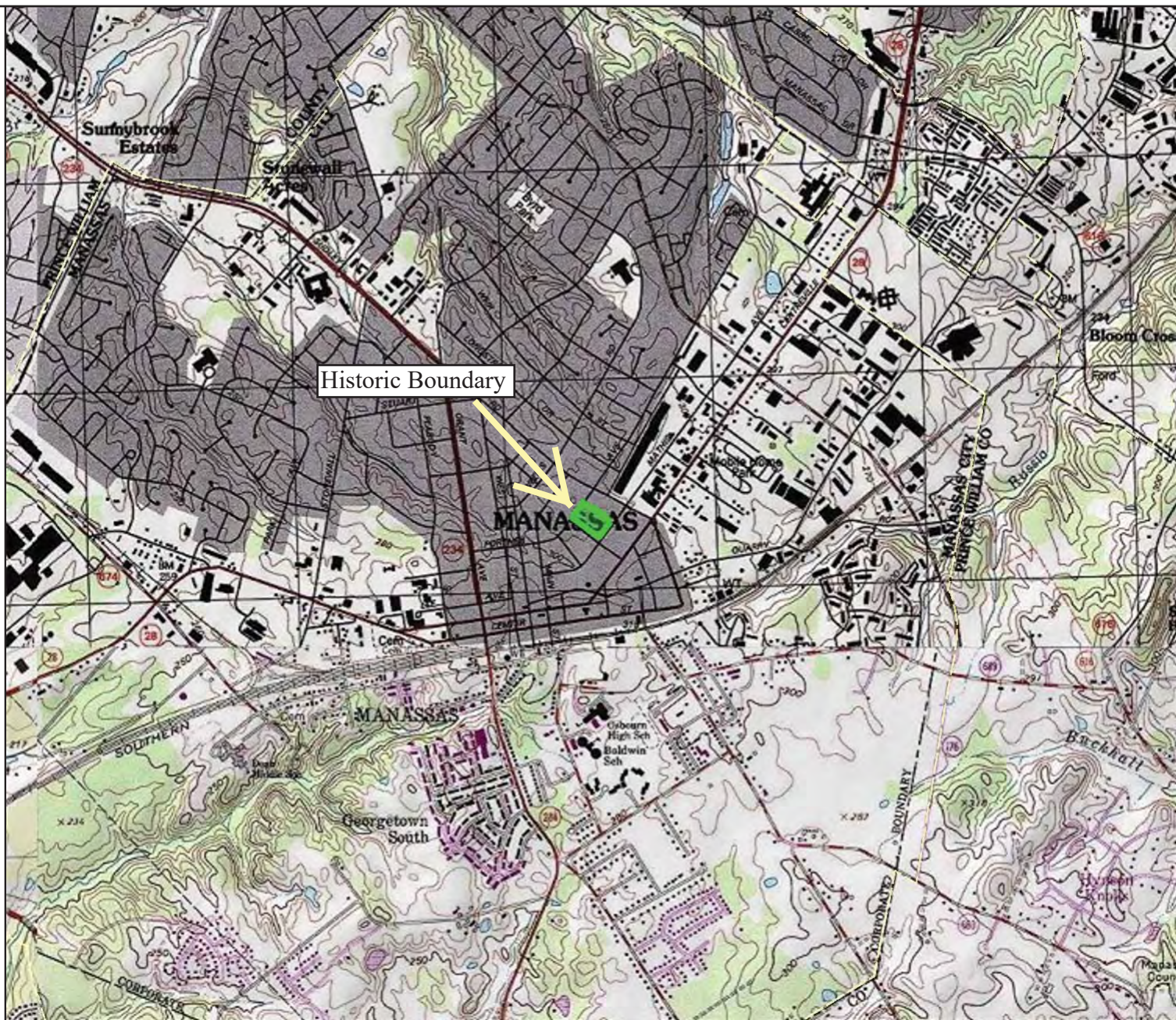
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



TOPOGRAPHIC MAP

Annaburg  
City of Manassas, VA  
DHR No. 155-0021



Feet

0 600 1200 1800 2400

1:36,112 / 1"=3,009 Feet

**Title:**

**Date:** 2/24/2022

*DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.*

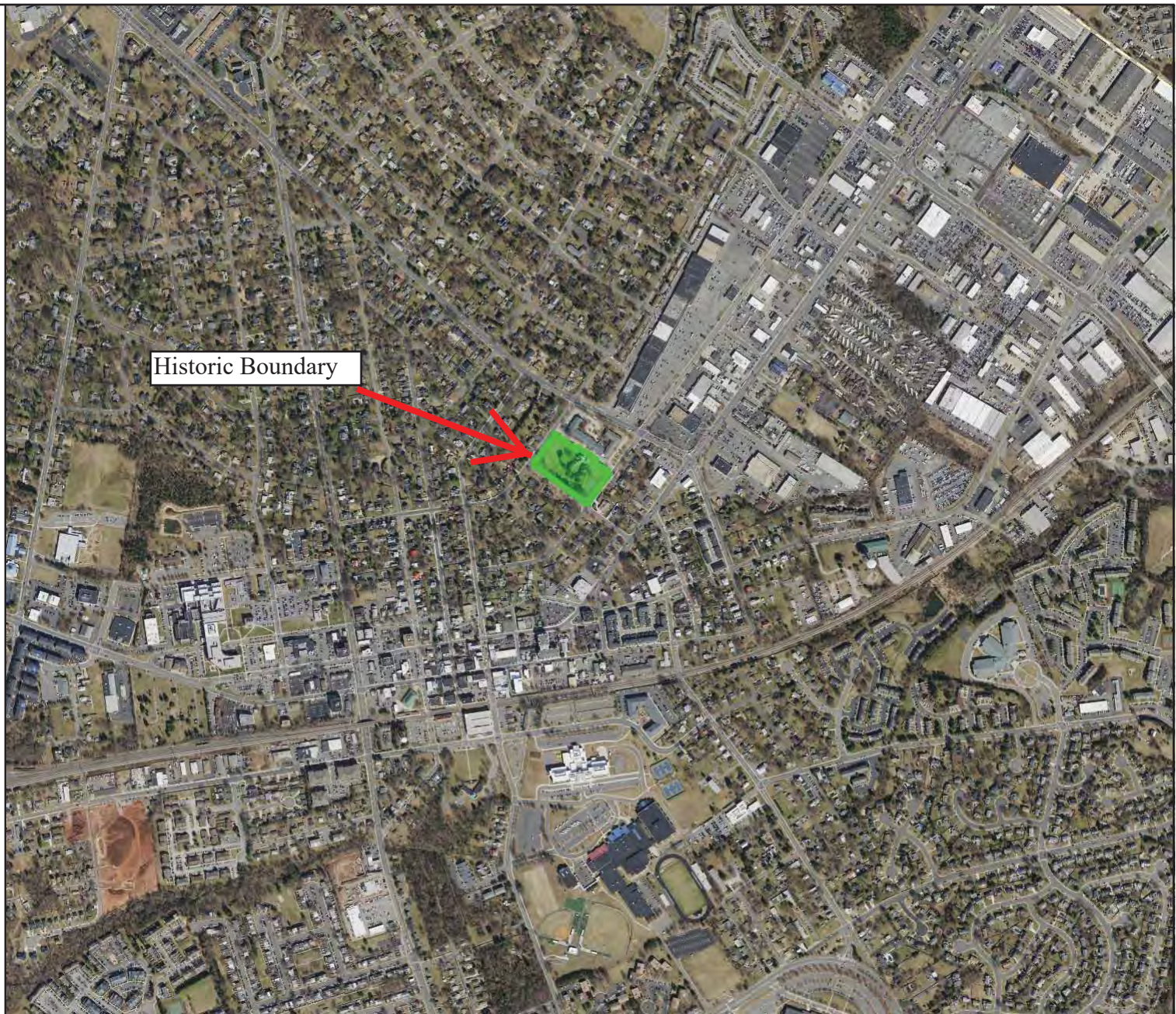
*Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.*

## AERIAL VIEW - VICINITY

Annaburg

City of Manassas, VA

DHR No. 155-0021



Feet

0 500 1000 1500 2000

1:18,056 / 1"=1,505 Feet

**Title:**

**Date: 2/24/2022**

*DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.*

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**LOCATION MAP**  
**Annaburg**  
**City of Manassas, VA**  
**DHR No. 155-0021**



Project Name: Annaburg Manor  
Latitude: 38.75551059  
Longitude: -77.46927197

Datum: NAD 1983 StatePlane Virginia North  
FIPS 4501 (US Feet)  
Software Used: ArcGIS PRO 2.6.3

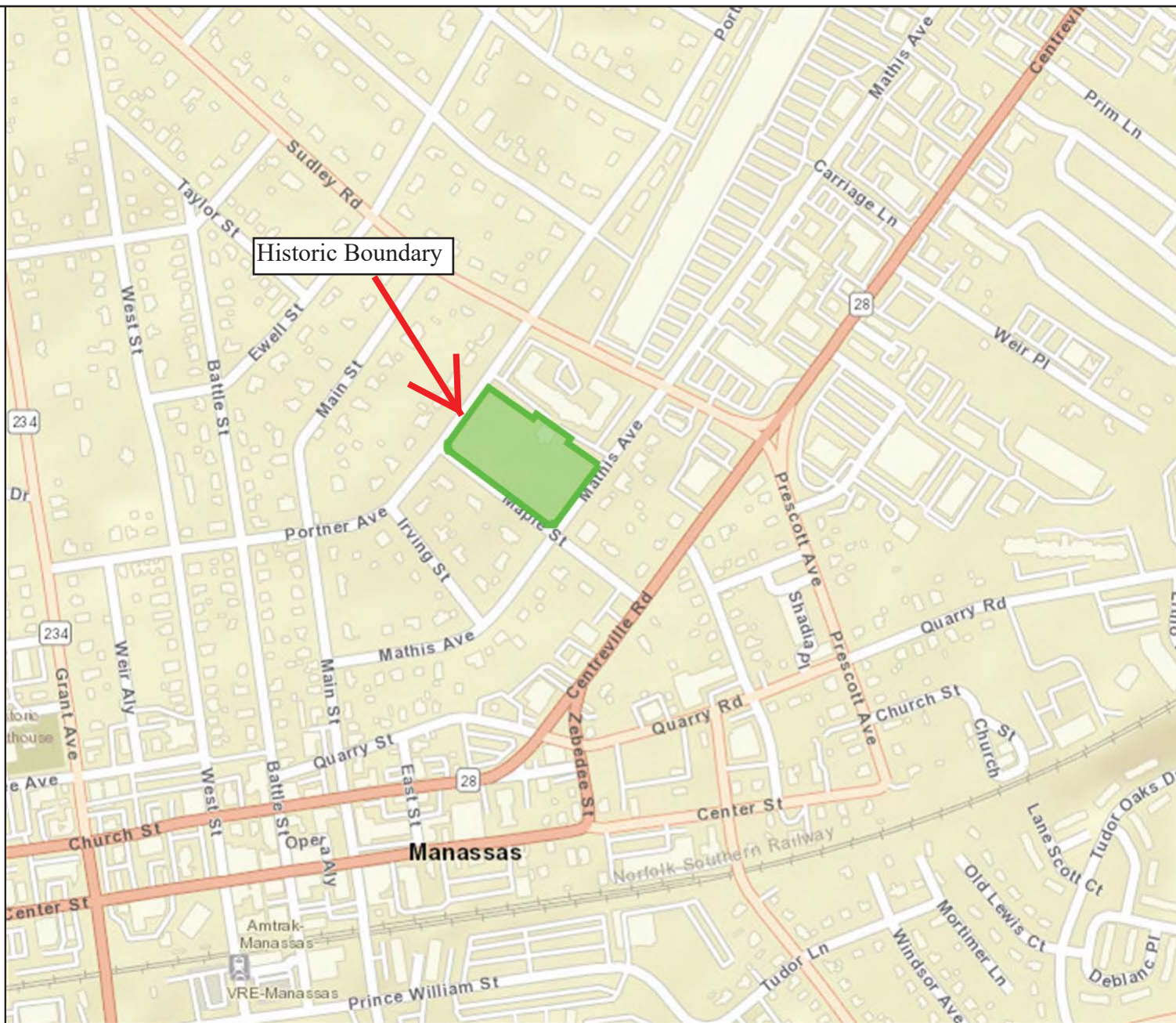
Prepared by: Manassas GIS  
Updated on: 12/16/2020  
Map Name: AnnaburgManor.aprx

This map is intended for reference purposes only. The City of Manassas does not provide any guarantee of the accuracy or completeness regarding the map information. Any determination of topography or contours, or any depiction of physical improvements, property lines or boundaries is for general information only and shall not be used for the design, modification, or construction of improvements to real property or for flood plain determination.



**STREET MAP**

Annaburg  
City of Manassas, VA  
DHR No. 155-0021



Feet



1:9,028 / 1"=752 Feet

**Title:**

**Date: 2/24/2022**

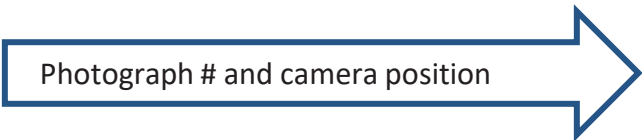
*DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.*

*Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.*

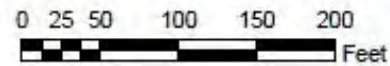
# SKETCH MAP/ PHOTO KEY

Annaburg  
City of Manassas, VA  
DHR No. 155-0021

A. Building  
(contributing)



Historic Boundary

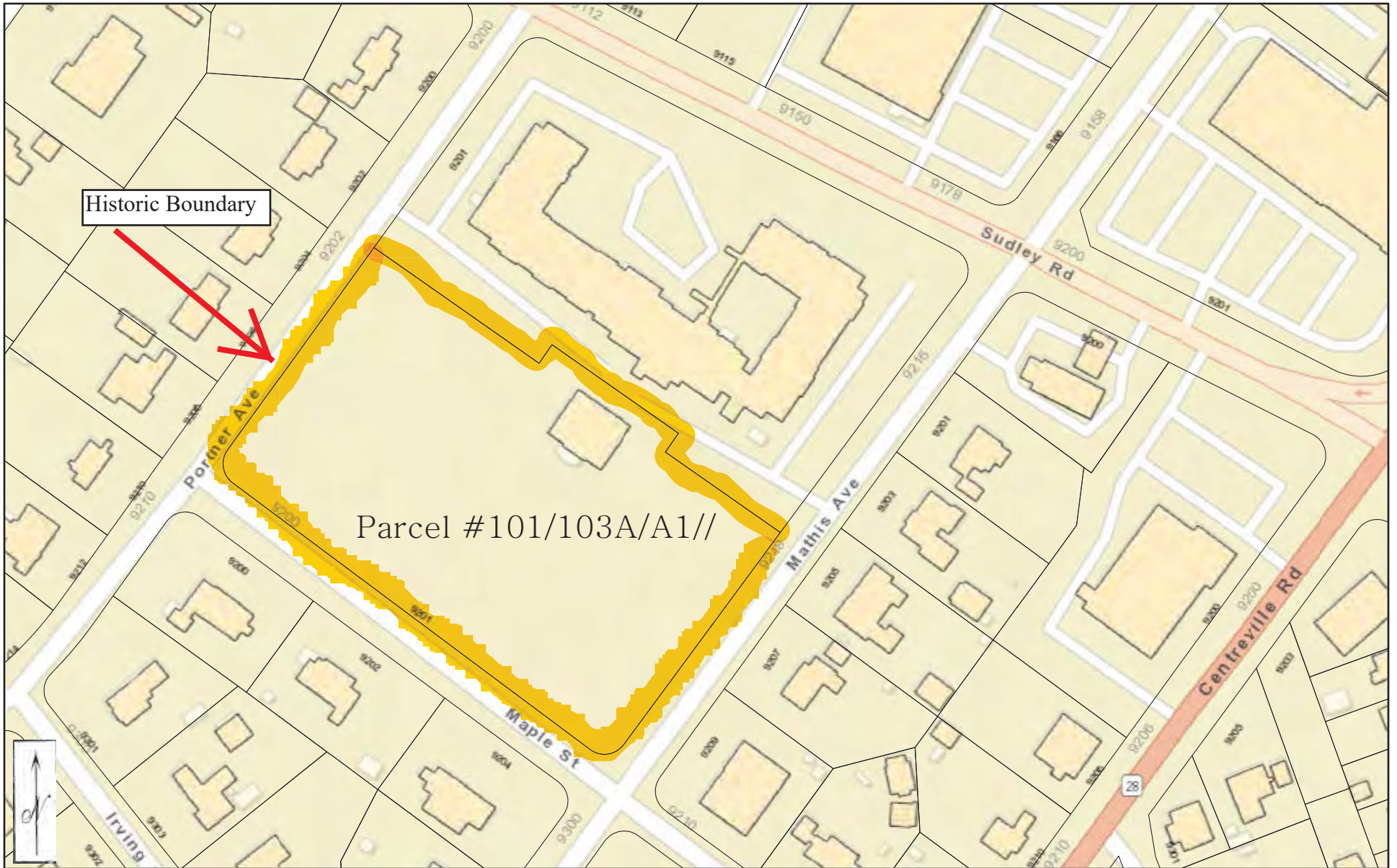


Project Name: Annaburg Manor  
Latitude: 38.75551059  
Longitude: -77.46927197

Datum: NAD 1983 StatePlane Virginia North  
FIPS 4501 (US Feet)  
Software Used: ArcGIS PRO 2.6.3

Prepared by: Manassas GIS  
Updated on: 12/16/2020  
Map Name: AnnaburgManor.aprx

# TAX PARCEL MAP, Annaburg, City of Manassas, VA, DHR No. 155-0021



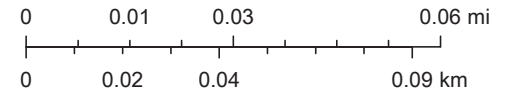
Accessed July 20, 2021

- Parcels
- Buildings

<https://cityofmanassas.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=888deba628b49a0b46f03c11b6df939>



1:2,257



Fairfax County, VA, Prince William County, VITA, Esri, HERE, Garmin,

DHR 155 0021