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United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

**1. Name**

historic "High Gate"; Watson, James Edwin, House

and/or common Ross Funeral Home

**2. Location**

street & number 801 Fairmont Avenue \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Fairmont \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ congressional district First

state West Virginia code 54 county Marion code 049

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
____ district	____ public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	____ agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	____ unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
____ structure	____ both	____ work in progress	____ educational
____ site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	____ entertainment
____ object	____ in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	____ government
	____ being considered	____ yes: unrestricted	____ industrial
		____ no	____ military
			____ other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Robert A. Ross, Eileen A. Ross & James T. Ross (Ross Realty Company)

street & number 801 Fairmont Avenue

city, town Fairmont \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state West Virginia

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Marion County Courthouse

street & number Adams Street

city, town Fairmont \_\_\_\_\_ state West Virginia 26554

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title \_\_\_\_\_ has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_ yes ☒ no

date \_\_\_\_\_ federal \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ state

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved      date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

High Gate (or Higate), the James Edwin Watson House, is an immense multigabled half-timbered structure. The walls of the first floor are of a native blue-green random-range ashlar, and the second floor and gables are stuccoed between six inch strips of stained chestnut with a course of quatrefoils separating the second and top floors. Indiana limestone is used around the doors and windows and also for the carved and very whimsical grotesques found on the porches and the porte-cochere. Elaborate carved chestnut vergeboards are placed in the gables and the dormers of the two story structure. Seven huge, almost sculptural, chimneys rise out of the red tile roof; the massing of the house and the strong use of horizontal and vertical elements give the building a very rhythmic and picturesque appearance.

The house consists of an irregular but basically rectangular main block with a large service wing jutting out at a 45 degree angle to the southwest. The entrance (east) front has four lateral gables and two dormers. The west front is accented by a large porte-cochere and a four-story octagonal tower.

The principal rooms on the ground floor are all paneled in oak and the floors are of parquetry design. The chimney pieces are generally of Italian marble; that in the entrance hall has a full overmantel in the Jacobean style. Ceilings are plaster - most are in the form of Elizabethan strapwork.

The interior detailing is quite fine. Of particular note are the great carved dog-leg staircase; the stained glass panels on many of the groundfloor leaded glass windows; the Grinling Gibbons-style carving above the dining room mantelpiece; the silver and brass sconces; the marble entrance vestibule; the oak paneled elevator; the German silver sink (formerly in the Butler's Pantry); and the Corinthian pilasters in the entrance hall.

The ground floor of High Gate is virtually unaltered, but minor alterations have occurred on the second floor in its transformation into apartments for the owners, and the basement has been changed for business purposes.

A very large H-shaped coach house is located at the southwest corner of the property. Built at the same time as the main house, it is also half-timbered and stone. It has been altered extensively for use as a nursing home.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates      1910      Builder/Architect      Horace Trumbauer, architect

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Jacobethan Revival (or Stockbrokers Tudor as it is sometime less reverently called) was a style chosen by old families who sought to assert their ties with Olde England and the nouveaux riches who sought to create them. Like newly enriched Elizabethans who sought to prove their respectability in stone and mortar, early twentieth century Americans of the Edwardian period did likewise. Mansions in that style were commonplace on Philadelphia's Main Line and New York's suburbs, but fewer substantial residences in that style were to be found in the hills of West Virginia. One of the notable exceptions to that rule was when James Edwin Watson, scion of a West Virginia coal dynasty, chose to build his magnificent home, High Gate, in 1910. Even more remarkable is the fact that almost alone among the coal magnates of West Virginia, the Watsons chose to build in their native city, and chose as their architect the nationally prominent Horace Trumbauer of Philadelphia.

James Edwin Watson was the fourth son of James Otis I, an early pioneer of the West Virginia coal industry. The elder Watson in 1858 had discovered cannel coal when building a brick kiln, and had quickly turned it to great advantage by transporting the coal to major cities by the newly-completed Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (this was one of the first instances in the United States of the coal-railroad affiliation which would become of progressively greater significance). J. O. Watson acquired a large piece of property to the southeast of the then-small town of Fairmont in 1849, and on or near this land his sons would build a series of mansions, most of which are now gone.

The Watsons prospered. Clarence Wayland Watson became a United States Senator (1911-1913) and his brother-in-law, Aretas Brooks Fleming, was governor of West Virginia (1890-1893). Virtually all male members of the Watson family were involved in the Watson-dominated Consolidation Coal Company (one of the largest in the United States) or one of its subsidiaries. J. E. Watson was no exception; he also had large timber interests and was president of the Bank of Fairmont.

Watson's choice of Horace Trumbauer (1868-1938) was a significant one. Trumbauer, along with McKim, Mead & White, Charles E. Pratt and Richard Morris Hunt, was one of the chief architects of the very rich in the Gilded Age. He had built a chateau for another coal magnate, Edward J. Berwind, but, typically, while much of Berwind's fortune was made in West Virginia, he chose to build in Newport, Rhode Island. Other clients included George Jay Gould, E. T. Stotesbury, P.A.B. Widener, James Buchanan Duke, Cornelius Vanderbilt III and Mrs. Henry Dodge. Trumbauer occasionally did commercial buildings (Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Boston), museums (the Philadelphia Museum of Art), or colleges (the nucleus of Duke University), but his real love was a grand residential

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building on a bottomless budget. While Trumbauer supervised most of the work put out by his office, after he made his reputation he seldom got near a drafting board, and much of his work was done by a young black, Julian Abele.

The combination of Watson's fortune and Trumbauer's taste was a happy one. High Gate exemplifies Edwardian opulence as well as any building in West Virginia, and is certainly the antithesis of any West Virginia stereotype. The craftsmanship and materials employed in the building of the Watson House were the best to be found. The house seems to succeed both through its detailing and as a whole. Proportions of the different rooms and particularly of the alternation of voids and solids on the exterior demonstrate a sound sense of good scale on a large scale. While the house itself would not be mistaken for a genuine Jacobean or Elizabethan manor house, it draws heavily on eclectic and antiquarian precedent to create a very American and (at the time) very modern and comfortable residence.

President William Howard Taft was entertained in the house and for years the house was lived in in a very grand scale. However, coal prices fluctuated greatly during the 1920's, affecting coal miner and coal operator alike, and Watson's own fortune was reduced. James Edwin Watson died in 1926, and in 1929 the house was sold to the Sisters of St. Joseph, who renamed it St. Joseph's Villa. The Sisters used the building as a rest home and later as a kindergarten. The Watson House is now sympathetically maintained as a funeral home, and the old coach house is a nursing home.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Dictionary of American Biography, Sup. II, pp667-668.

Murphy, Robert E., ed., Progressive West Virginians, The Wheeling News, Wheeling, 1905.

Marion County Centennial Yearbook, Fairmont, 1963.

West Virginia, A Guide to the Mountain State, Writers Program of the Works Project

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 4½ acres

Quadrangle name Fairmont West, W.Va.

Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000

UMT References

A 

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5	7	12	8	18	0
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**Verbal boundary description and justification** The Watson, James Edwin, House, coachhouse and grounds are located in a rectangle bounded to the S.E. by Fairmont Ave., to the N.E. by 8th St., to the N.W. by Walnut Ave., and to the S.W. by 9th St.

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries**

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Peter Flagg Maxson, Architectural Historian,  
and Rodney S. Collins, Architectural Historian

organization Historic Preservation Unit

W.Va. Dept. of Culture & History date September 9, 1981

The Cultural Center

street & number Capitol Complex telephone (304) 348-0240

city or town Charleston state West Virginia 25305

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☒ state ☐ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Historic Preservation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date December 7, 1981

For HCPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Administration, Oxford University Press, 1941.

Conley, Phil, History of the West Virginia Coal Industry, Education Foundation, Inc.,  
Charleston, W.Va., 1960.

7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

NW/4 FAIRMONT 15' QUADRANGLE

MORGANTOWN 16 MI.  
RIVESVILLE 2.6 MI.

80°07'30"  
39°30'

1810000 FEET 10'



