

WILSON ESTATE, THE FLAT
9100 Rockville Pike
Bethesda
Montgomery County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-1105-C

HABS
MD
16-BETH,
2C-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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HABS No. MD-1105-C

HABS
MD
16-BETH
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Location: 9100 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, Montgomery County, Maryland

USGS Kensington, Maryland Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.317850.4319050

Significance: Originally constructed ca. 1926 as a one-story garage possibly with small staff quarters, "the Flat," as it was called by the Wilson family, was later expanded and converted into a guest house and servants quarters around the time of the Wilsons' 1942 donation of the principal residence, Tree Tops, to NIH. The Flat contains key architectural characteristics found on the Lodge and Tree Tops, and is considered an important element in a collection of buildings comprising the Wilson estate.

Description: The Flat is a one-and-one-half-story, stucco and wood-shingled cottage, located just north of the Lodge. Its dimensions are approximately 22' x 41'. It is rectangular in plan, four bays by two bays, with a side-gabled roof and a shed-roofed, three-bay projecting dormer on each side. The wooden walls and gable ends of the house are heavily stuccoed with heavy natural-wood trim, and the roof and walls of the dormers are clad with wood cedar-shake shingles; the building has copper gutters. The windows of the house are mainly single, double-hung, six-over-six, wood-sash windows.

The eastern end gable, which serves as the main facade, faces east toward the main house, Tree Tops. The gable ends have deep eave overhangs with bargeboards that are flared at their ends with the same square peg detail seen in the Lodge. The wooden facade has been heavily stuccoed and originally featured two large bays, which served as garage entrances. Framed by large timber beams, these two bays have been filled in with the addition of bay window and an entrance door. Extending from the eastern facade is a shallow patio of poured concrete, which appears to have originally served as paving for the driveway leading into the garage bay openings. The west facade's end gable also contains an entrance door. No evidence of corresponding garage bays is visible on this facade, and it is likely that this end originally served as a small staff quarters or storage area. A small brick chimney exists behind the gable roof. A large flagstone patio extends from the facade to the garage located to the west.

The north and south facades of the house are identical, with the first floor punctuated by four windows, and the half-story featuring a long shed-roofed three-bay dormer with three pairs of double-hung, six-over-six, wood-sash windows. A slight water table is built into the first-story facade at the height of three feet. A large wood and glass shed-roof greenhouse set atop a concrete slab has been added to the westernmost two bays of the south facade, accessible only from a small exterior door on the west greenhouse facade.

History: The Flat, originally designed as a one-story garage with staff quarters, was later converted into a one-and-a-half-story guest cottage. It appears to have been designed

concurrently with the conversion of the farmhouse into the Lodge, and in concert with its architectural details. Physical evidence suggests that it was constructed without the full-length dormers or second-floor finished living space.

The redesign of the garage into exclusive residential use probably occurred in the 1940s, around the time that Helen W. Wilson donated Tree Tops to NIH and renovated the Lodge as her primary residence. Apparently, also at around this time, a four-bay metal garage building and a small shed were constructed to the west (see HABS No. MD-1105-A). The renovation of the Flat included the conversion of the garage bays at the east end of the building into a large living room, with the addition of a raised wooden floor over the former garage floor of poured concrete. The southern bay on the east facade received a bay window matching the one on the Lodge, and the northern bay of this elevation was reconfigured with a canopied entranceway. The second floor was finished for living, illuminated by the addition of two full-length dormers on the south and north roof pitches. A stairway was retrofitted in the rear hall to provide access. Several original roof rafters remained in place and were incorporated into the second floor interior walls; some doors in the second-floor interior have one corner clipped, to accommodate a concealed rafter.

According to oral history sources, the Wilson family named the building "The Flat." The Luke W. Wilson family utilized the downstairs room as a dining room, family room, and later, an office for themselves after they moved into the Lodge in the 1960s. The Wilson's cook and housekeeper lived upstairs and the building apparently continued to be used as a staff residences until the death of Ruth Ferguson Wilson in 1989.¹ As part of the expansion of the Clinical Center, NIH plans to demolish the Flat, along with several other buildings of the Wilson Estate.

Sources: Interview with Dorothy Pugh, recalling her 1987 interview with Ruth Ferguson Wilson, conducted by Tory L. Taylor, Robinson & Associates, Inc., June 12, 1991.

Historians: Paul K. Williams, Heather P. Ewing, Architectural Historians
Judith H. Robinson, Principal, Robinson and Associates, Inc.
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¹Interview with Dorothy Pugh, recalling her 1987 interview with Ruth Ferguson Wilson, conducted by Tory L. Taylor, Robinson & Associates, Inc., June 12, 1991.