

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

HABS No. MD-1105-E

HABS
MD
16-BETH,
2E-

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

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Location: 9100 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, Montgomery County, Maryland

USGS Kensington, Maryland Quadrangle

Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.317800.4319000

Significance: The Cabin was one of a collection of buildings that comprised the Wilson Estate, Tree Tops. Associated perhaps with an earlier farm on the site, the building has an original main block that appears to date from the late nineteenth century. The Wilsons apparently moved the house to its current location at the southwestern corner of the estate, and enlarged it with a series of small additions for use as a guest cottage.

Description: The Cabin consists of an original nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century two-room house with a front-facing gable. Its layout follows a vernacular rectangular plan. A northern addition, equal in size to the original one-story house, has a side-gabled roof and recessed main entryway facing east. Together, the two sections of the building have several shed additions to the rear or west facades. The additions appear to have been constructed shortly after the original construction, as the materials and style closely resemble the original two-room house. The large addition to the north created an L-shaped plan which steps down the slope of the site. The resulting building has simple, dropped, white-painted siding typical of the 1930s and 1940s, a cedar-shake roof with metal gutters, and plain boxed corners and window surrounds, all set atop a shallow brick foundation with small, brick-sized iron vents leading to the crawl space below.

The Cabin is currently oriented to face east toward the Lodge. The south facade, the side facade of the original cottage, may have once served as the primary access to the dwelling before the northern wing was added; it is composed of three bays, with an extended concrete patio running the length of the facade. The east facade of the original wing features a set of three metal casement windows with eight lights centered under the gable. Most of the other windows of the residence are single, double-hung, wood-sash windows with either two-over-two lights or a six-over-six configuration.

The west or rear facade is composed of three small extensions with shed roofs and brick or concrete foundations that step down the sloping site, with the lowest point at the northern end of the building. At the southern end of the facade is a screened porch with distinctive arched, top-hinged screen panels in front of six, large, single-light, wood sliding windows -- two each on the south, west, and east facades. There is a simple entrance in the middle of this facade -- a single, wood, triple-paneled door with an eight-light window; brass hardware, and a shed-roofed, wood, shingled canopy above a single stone step. Two brick chimneys extend from the concealed western facade of the original block of the Cabin; one is a rectangular chimney with simple decorative bands at the center of the gable, and the other is a square chimney at the intersection of the original house block and the large north addition.

The alterations and additions to the Cabin over time appear to date from shortly after the original construction in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century and are composed of materials and details that closely imitate the original block. The windows of the cottage were until recently flanked by decorative paneled shutters with a jigsaw tree design, a motif that was once carried throughout several of the Tree Tops estate buildings.

History: According to Dorothy Pugh's 1987 discussions with Ruth Ferguson Wilson, the wife of Luke W. Wilson, the Wilson family called the wood-frame house located at the southwest corner of the property the Cabin; this nickname was derived partly from a story that it had once served as a slave cabin on the Britton farm, predating the Wilson ownership, although this anecdote cannot be substantiated. An old undated drawing of the complicated electrical configuration found on the electrical box is titled "Cabin-Elect, Wilson," confirming the name.

Pugh's 1987 discussions with Ruth Ferguson Wilson also revealed that the Cabin was moved to its current location, close to the Lodge, from elsewhere on the estate and enlarged for use as a guest cottage. A 1917 property atlas does not show a structure on this spot (Deets & Maddox, Real Estate Atlas of Montgomery County). The renovation of the older section and the architectural characteristics of the various additions appear to have been completed by the 1940s, consistent with renovations occurring on other buildings of the estate.

Following the donation of the Wilson's main residence, Tree Tops, to NIH in 1942, the then recently widowed Helen Wilson moved to the Lodge. In addition to certain alterations that were probably undertaken at the Lodge to accommodate her occupancy, it seems likely that other alterations -- such as the creation of the Flat (see HABS No. MD-1105-C) through the conversion of the garage into full living quarters, and the augmentation of the Cabin, were undertaken to serve the needs of the lost guest and staff accommodations that may have been located within Tree Tops.

The Cabin appears to have been used during the Luke W. Wilson family's occupancy of the Lodge as a guest house, according to visual evidence. In conjunction with the expansion of the Clinical Center, NIH plans to demolish the Cabin along with several other buildings of the Wilson Estate.

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

Offutt, William. *Bethesda: A Social History of the Area Through World War Two*. Bethesda, Maryland: The Innovation Game, 1995.

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