

NATIONAL PARK SEMINARY, BALLROOM
(National Park Seminary, Ament Hall
Walter Reed Medical Center Annex, Building No. 101H)
Linden Lane
Silver Spring
Montgomery County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-1109-F

HABS
MD
16-SILSPR,
2F.

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

RECEIVED
MAY 19 1983

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Seminary, Ballroom
(Ament Hall)
(Walter Reed Medical Center Annex, Building No. 101H)

HABS
MD
16-SILSPR,
2F.

HABS No. MD-1109-F

Location: The ballroom is attached to the southwest side of the President's House wing of Main. Its rear faces out on to Sachs Road and the clubhouse cluster on the western side of campus.

Significance: Ament Hall was the most spectacular structure built by Ament. It is the tallest building on campus. Its main feature is the grand ballroom, which spans its entire height. It is the most important communal space on the campus, especially after the loss of the Odeon Theater. The creation of such an awesome space for dancing epitomized the school's focus on social graces and recreational pursuits. Unlike other structures built by Ament, the ballroom has Gothic rather than Beaux-Arts architectural overtones. Its massive size added to the monumental and eclectic quality of the campus design.

History: Ament Hall was erected in 1927 at a cost of \$482,000.¹ According to legend, a local builder rejected Ament's building design as unsound, but Ament went ahead and had it constructed anyway.² The ballroom was a great point of pride for the school. Numerous images of it appear in the school's promotional literature and catalogs. Formal balls and daily informal dances kept the ballroom in constant use. When the Army took the campus over, it was used as a recreational center for the convalescing patients. It had ping-pong tables and television sets in it. Apparently, the wooden dance floor was off-limits except for special occasions.³ Large student suites were located on the second and third floors around the periphery of the ballroom. They were the largest accommodations at the school. The building also contained two art studios.

Description:

The five-sided stuccoed building is attached to the rear of the 1919 Main extension, at the convex of the addition's two wings. It is a three-story structure with a basement and sub-basement, the latter of which have stone foundation walls. The building measures 96' by 120'.⁴ A carriage way runs through its west side. The windows are asymmetrically placed on the facades. The typical window is a tall, narrow casement window with either nine-over-one or one-over-one sashes. The

¹ NPS catalog, 1927.

² "Dr. JE Ament, Seminary Head is Dead in NY," [newspaper unknown], July 22, 1936.

³ Zene Colt, "Down in Forest Glen," *The Washington Post*, Potomac Section, May 21, 1967.

⁴ NPS catalog, 1927.

windows are all the same height but are constructed in various widths. There are more bays on the first floor than the second and third floors. A segmentally-shaped curved balcony with balustraded porch is located on the basement level, over the carriage way at the south end of the building. The third floor had an exterior balcony that wrapped partially around the structure. The roof is composed of a main gable broken by several smaller gables with stained glass windows that form a clerestory.

The building's main interior feature is a grand ballroom, which spanned its entire height. An ambulatory measuring twenty-four feet across surrounds the wooden dance floor. An ornate fireplace is located at the south end. Second- and third-floor balconies with balustrades are divided into ten bays by square brick columns topped with elliptical arches. Above each of the arches are three alcoves, each containing a classical urn, sculpture, or bust. The ballroom is crowned with a clerestory with large Gothic windows and an open-beamed roof. It was equipped with a victrola and enormous speakers.

ADDENDUM TO:
NATIONAL PARK SEMINARY, BALLROOM
(Ament Hall)
(Walter Reed Medical Center Annex, Building No. 101H)
Linden Lane
Silver Spring
Montgomery County
Maryland

HABS MD-1109-F
MD, 16-SILSPR, 2F-

HABS
MD
16-SILSPR,
2-F

PHOTOGRAPHS

PAPER COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS