

NATIONAL PARK SEMINARY, CASTLE  
(Walter Reed Medical Center Annex, Building No. 107)  
Ravine in northeast part of campus  
Silver Spring  
Montgomery County  
Maryland

HABS No. MD-1109-I

HABS  
MD  
16-SILSPR,  
2I-

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

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY**  
**National Park Seminary, Castle**  
**(Walter Reed Medical Center Annex, Building No. 107)**

HABS  
MD  
16-SILSPR,  
21-

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Location: The castle is located in the ravine in the northeast part of the campus. It is between the villa and the Colonial House.

Significance: The castle is one of the NPS clubhouses. The fanciful, medieval fortress for the Pi Beta Nu sorority counterbalanced the symmetrical architectural forms, such as the villa and the Colonial House, in this section of the campus. It helped fuse this area with the more informal styles on the main campus. The fairytale-like castle with crenelated tower and Gothic windows is reminiscent of garden follies common in English gardens in the eighteenth century and revived in American suburban and garden architecture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Gothic Revival style became popular in the mid-nineteenth century, in part, as a reaction against the vast transformations caused by industrialization.<sup>1</sup>

The most common medieval revival designs were patterned after peasant cottages rather than crenelated castles. The former style was popularized by A.J. Downing in the mid-nineteenth century. A.J. Davis designed many villas in the crenelated castle form, including Lyndhurst in Tarrytown, New York, probably his most famous. Fonthill, a Gothic villa built along the Hudson River in 1848, is strikingly similar to the Beta clubhouse, but on a much grander scale. Many colleges and universities, especially the smaller, elite ones, used Gothic Revival designs in order to align themselves with English scholastic traditions. Some NPS historians suggested that the castle was a tongue-in-cheek reference to collegiate Gothic designs, but, judging by the NPS mission, I believe, the building design is more likely an expression of elite tastes in domestic and garden architecture.

History: The castle was erected in 1904, at the same time that the large vehicular bridge to which it was attached was constructed. A two-story stone attachment was built on the east side of the castle by 1922. The Army converted the clubhouse into a nurses recreation center. It was also supposedly used as a brothel during World War II.<sup>2</sup> It was later converted into officers' family housing.

Description: The castle clubhouse looks like a medieval fortress. It is a two-story round building with basement and attachments. The stuccoed building is banked into the hillside,

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<sup>1</sup> See campus planning section in HABS No. MD-1109 for a broader description of Gothic Revival and picturesque architecture.

<sup>2</sup> Les Brindley, "Forest Glen," *Bulletin*, National Park College Alumnae Association newsletter (Summer 1985).

exposing the stone foundation on the southwest “side.” There is a stuccoed chimney to the east. The main body of the building has a flat roof with crenelations. The first floor windows are double-sash windows in various sizes. The second-floor has pointed-arch double-sash windows. On the south “side” of the main tower, there is a pointed-arch double-door with small round windows in each door. The door awkwardly stands in mid-air since a faux drawbridge that connected the building to the vehicular bridge was removed in the 1960s.

A much narrower and one-story taller crenelated tower is located on the northwest “side ” of the main body. It has round-arched windows. A stone-faced one-and-a-half story addition wraps around the southeast portion of the main tower. This section was added in the 1920s by Ament. The flat-roofed addition has a small round crenulated tower at its southeast corner and battlements along its roofline. It has double-sash windows. Several stone steps led up to a round-arched entryway at the northeast corner. There is a two-bay arcade on the north side of the porch.

ADDENDUM TO:  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

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