

NATIONAL PARK SEMINARY, JAPANESE PAGODA  
(Walter Reed Medical Center Annex, Building No. 108)  
2805 Linden Lane  
Silver Spring  
Montgomery County  
Maryland

HABS No. MD-1109-J

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MD  
16-SILSPR,  
2J-

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

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### National Park Seminary, Japanese Pagoda (Walter Reed Medical Center Annex, Building No. 108)

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Location: 2805 Linden Lane; the pagoda is located in the southwest part of the campus, between the Swiss chalet and the Japanese bungalow.

Significance: The Japanese pagoda is one of the landmark campus buildings. Even before its upturned eaves were removed, the Japanese bungalow looked austere compared to this ostentatious structure next door. Instead of simply incorporating Japanese detailing on an American house design, the pagoda resembles a Japanese temple. It is one of the most flamboyant and ornamental of any of the campus structures. The building was one of eight clubhouses built on campus. It was the sorority house for Chi Psi Epsilon. The pagoda was not a rare form of garden and suburban architecture. The building type appeared in many estate gardens and in many suburban neighborhoods. Only one other girls school was located that had a Japanese-inspired building on campus, however. Traces of a Japanese design are barely legible in the Ransom Everglades School's meeting house, located in Coconut Grove, Florida.<sup>1</sup> It is not nearly as provocative as the pagoda at NPS.

Since the eighteenth century, wealthy English and American estate owners have erected Asian-inspired houses and follies on their grounds.<sup>2</sup> Asian designs became popular with Americans after trade with China was established in the eighteenth century. The reopening of trade with Japan in the 1850s after years of isolation, the publication of Edward Morse's *Japanese Homes and their Surroundings* in 1885, and the exhibition of Japanese houses at World Fairs, all contributed to the popularity of Japanese goods and designs around the turn of the twentieth century. Exotic forms, in this case, Asian, were intended to reflect the owner's sophistication and refinement. Many wealthy Americans had Japanese rooms in their houses and less affluent ones purchased Japanese wares.

Because of its size and ostentatious design, the pagoda looks more like a garden folly than a dwelling house. A wide assortment of exotic Japanese buildings were designed as enticing eye-catchers in many country estate gardens. Some were placed within picturesque English-style landscapes and others were a part of a larger Japanese garden design. Japanese architects were responsible for many works, but pattern books were also available for American builders' use. The NPS pagoda was probably a result of the latter. Because the pagoda is closely situated

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<sup>1</sup> Gwyn Headley, *Architectural Follies in America* (New York: Preservation Press, 1996), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Information regarding the historical context of the pagoda was derived from Clay Lancaster, *The Japanese Influence in America* (New York: Walton H. Rawls, 1963).

between several eclectic buildings instead of in a natural garden setting, it is slightly out of context for a garden folly and somewhat more like an amusement park attraction.

History: The Japanese pagoda was built in 1907. Between 1919 and 1923, a one-story pavilion, or tea room, was added to its west side. In deference to the war effort, the Japanese pagoda was renamed the Chinese pagoda after the attack on Pearl Harbor.<sup>3</sup> The open third-floor gallery and glass-enclosed second-floor gallery were both fully-enclosed when it was transformed into officer family housing under the Army's ownership. The group Save Our Seminary is currently renovating the structure. It has removed layers of Army paint and restored the exterior to its original brilliant red and black design.

Description: The clubhouse looks like a Japanese temple. According to the 1907 catalog, the pagoda was modeled after the Shrine of Toujovo, whose origins and design could not be traced. It is composed of a three-storied main pavilion and a one-story addition with exposed stone foundations. The original structure did not have the attachment. Each tier of the main pavilion has wide overhanging, corbeled eaves that curve up at the corners. The top two tiers have exposed rafters. The bottom one also has plain brackets that are not original to the building. Each story is successively smaller as it nears the top. The structure is crowned with a hipped-gable roof with decorative Japanese cutout-wood ornamentations within the gables and above the gables on the roof ridge. The exterior walls have shoji screens translated in wood in a stick-style design.

On the north, or front, facade, the overhanging eaves curve up over the front double-door and are supported by round columns that together form a temple-like entryway. The doorway is surrounded by engaged round-columns that support an upturned Japanese lintel. Japanese ornamental designs are applied to the door surround. The door is flanked by single-sash windows set within the shoji screen-work. The second floor has the faux shoji screen design on its walls with two pairs of symmetrically-placed double-sash windows. A short wooden rail in a grid pattern surrounds the second-floor. The third floor has three pairs of nine-over-nine double-sash windows with decorative stick-work in a grid pattern below them. The third floor was originally an open porch, but it was enclosed during the Army's tenure.

The other facades continue the pattern of the front facade. Each has shoji screen-patterned walls with sash windows set within the design. The east facade has two single-sash windows divided by two bays on the first floor, a pair of double-sash windows on the second floor, and a pair of nine-over-nine sash windows on the third floor. The south facade has a door set in a one-bay extension at the east end and a single-sash window at the west end, two pairs of double-sash windows on the second floor, and three pairs of nine-over-nine sash windows on the third floor.

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<sup>3</sup>“National Park College to Be Army Hospital,” *The Washington Post*, August 27, 1942.

The interior has remnants of the original bamboo molding and wainscoting on the second and third floors.

On the west side of the building, there is a one-story pavilion with raised basement that was added in the 1920s. It is connected to the pagoda by a hyphen with floor-to-ceiling two-over-two windows and a flat roof. The addition, known as the tea room, has a stone foundation. The first floor facades resemble the main pagoda. There are three double-sash windows set in the typical ornamental wall paneling on the north, south, and west facades. The middle window on the west facade is placed in a full-height bay. The foundation level has a door and three windows on the north facade and windows on the other sides. The pavilion is capped by a steeply-pitched, flared gable roof with decorative roof ridge in imitation of the larger structure. A rectangular brick chimney abuts the roof's west end. In the front yard, two stairways on the east and west end of the main pagoda lead up to a terrace. The piers flanking the stairs are adorned with stone Japanese lanterns that were added by 1908.

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