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On the cover:

The four lives of National Park Seminary as hotel,
school, Army facility, and residential community.


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THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY STORY Contents

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THE HISTORY OF NATIONAL PARK SEMINARY, A MONTGOMERY COUNTY TREASURE

*By Anne Brockett, Donald Hall,
Linda Lyons, and Bonnie Rosenthal
of
Save Our Seminary
at Forest Glen*



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INTRODUCTION

The National Park Seminary Historic District in the Forest Glen neighborhood of Silver Spring, Maryland is one of the most architecturally whimsical places in the country. When encountering this unique collection of buildings, forested hills, and steep glen with stream, visitors enter another world – a place both pleasing to the eye and awakening to the senses. Yet this place has survived hardships and had several lives, with its newest incarnation well on its way to completion.

This brief story describes the unusual history of an unusual place. The earliest recorded use of this site centered around tobacco farming, but with the coming of the railroad and land development, a rustic inn was constructed in the late 19th century and later transformed into the National Park Seminary School for Girls. During World War II, an Army rehabilitation hospital used the site. A plan to demolish the buildings led activists in 1988 to create Save Our Seminary at Forest Glen, which was instrumental in saving the site.

After a decades-long battle to preserve this unique historic and architectural gem, the grounds today are home to residents of a community of apartments, condominiums, townhouses, and single-family homes. Thus do the many lives of the National Park Seminary site continue to evolve and surprise.

THE RESORT YEARS

Suburbanization in Montgomery County became possible with the beginning of passenger service on the Metropolitan Branch of the B&O Railroad in 1873. In Forest Glen, the development that followed was conceived by the Forest Glen Improvement Company as a summer resort called the Forest Inn and an adjacent residential community, Forest Glen Park.

The land on which the hotel was erected had been in use for more than a century as tobacco-producing farmland. Initially settled by the influential Carroll family, Forest Glen was the location of the plantation home of John Carroll, the first Archbishop of the United States and founder of Georgetown University, and his brother Daniel II, a signer of the Constitution. Two neighboring plantations, Edgewood and the Highlands, were also associated with the Carrolls and used nearby Rock Creek to transport hogsheads of tobacco to Georgetown for export.¹

With the land depleted by intensive tobacco production, the Forest Glen Improvement Company saw value in its conversion from farmland to residential subdivision. They purchased 81 acres in 1886, including the steep ravine known as the glen, later adding an additional 165 acres to their holdings. The company constructed a rustic, Shingle-style hotel across the glen from the railroad station in 1887, with the intent of luring Washingtonians out from the city to enjoy the country air and to consider purchasing property here. The company's investors sought to capitalize on the site's



The train was the link to development of the Forest Glen section of Silver Spring.

natural advantages of good water, the absence of malaria, and freedom from the city's heat and humidity and to promote the resort as a convenient and healthful summer residence for the whole family. This concept fit in well with the prevailing romantic vision of nature and the advantages of recreation and fitness.²

The area surrounding the Inn, dubbed Forest Glen Park, was divided into wooded lots and offered to those who wished to build their own suburban homes close to the District line, with convenient access to the city. A large model house, which came to be known as Braemar, was built nearby as an example of the company's preferred style of architecture for its fledgling neighborhood.³

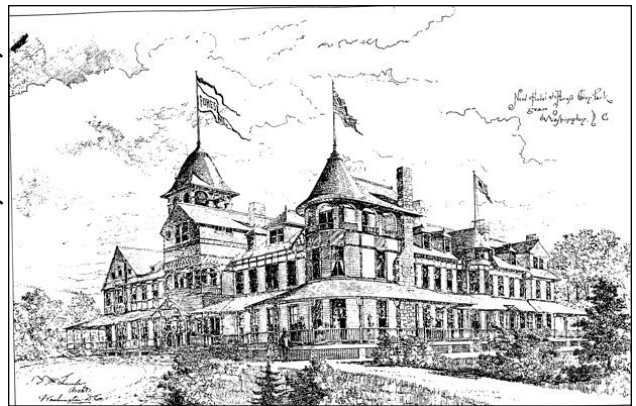
A cast iron bridge was constructed across the glen to facilitate access from the railroad station to the resort. Luggage and those arriving by carriage or on horseback traveled on the Washington and Brookeville Turnpike (today's Georgia Avenue), through the glen, and around to the back of the Inn to arrive via what is now Linden Lane.



Braemar was the model home of early residential development in Forest Glen Park.

The Forest Inn took advantage of nearby attractions including Rock Creek and the Carroll Springs Sanitarium, the former Carroll home, which offered medicinal treatments at its mineral springs and resort activities such as swimming, croquet, and dancing. The Inn got its water from the Sanitarium, as did the Seminary in later years when the Sanitarium also served as the school's infirmary. The Sanitarium was torn down for a housing development in the 1930s.⁴

The Inn was carefully sited on Lot 1 of Forest Glen Park facing north to the station with picturesque views of the glen and the farmland beyond. At the back of the Inn, the upper balconies were said to provide views of Washington, D.C. and its monuments. Architect Thomas Franklin Schneider provided the rambling three-story building with a variety of charming interior spaces and finishes, gracious porches, and a general feeling of being at home in the country. Very tall windows on the first floor minimized the separation between indoors and outdoors. The building was constructed of local materials – wood from the abundant forest and stones from an adjacent granite quarry.⁵



Thomas F. Schneider designed this rustic inn as a country retreat for Washingtonians.

The hotel was run by Tenney and Company, which also operated the popular National Hotel in Washington. Fees for double occupancy and board were \$8-\$14 per week or \$2.50 per day for short-term guests. The resort also became a popular destination for day trippers who wished to stroll the grounds and enjoy a meal in the dining room, supplied by the Inn's own farm and dairy. Walkways and roads through the woodlands were created to reach scenic vistas or picturesque natural features. Places that were later popular with Seminary students included Lookout House, overlooking the Rock Creek valley, and the nearby natural springs.⁶

During the week, the Inn was filled with children and women, with their husbands joining them on weekends after their work in the city, a typical arrangement at suburban resorts. Activities for guests

included bowling, billiards, lawn tennis, croquet, archery, and horseback riding. Dancing, open-air concerts, seasonal festivities, and holiday celebrations provided plenty of entertainment.

Ultimately, the Inn did not succeed. There was fierce competition among many similar establishments in the area, and some said that the walk across the glen might be too far for railroad passengers. In 1891 the summer resort opened year-round and introduced gambling and alcohol. Despite these efforts, the business did not survive the nationwide financial crisis of 1893.



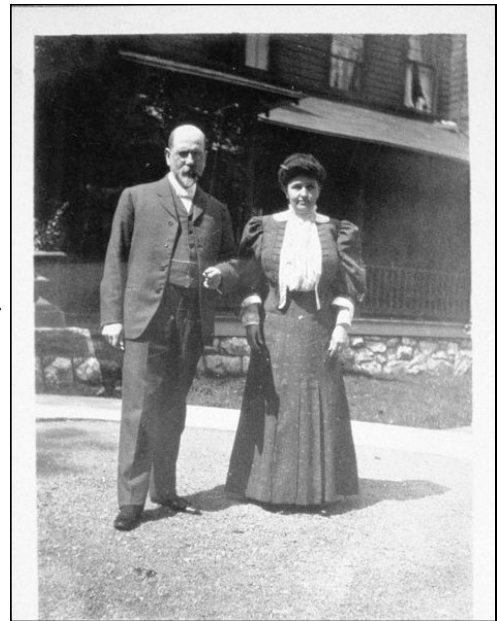
The Forest Inn reflected the Victorian style of the period.

Fortunately by this time, a vision for the future of the site was already taking form. John and Vesta Cassedy, a husband-and-wife team of education specialists, were looking for a place to open a school. They are said to have looked in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore for a site, as well as checking out the Woodlawn Hotel in Rockville and the Forest Inn.⁷

Although the Forest Inn was not available at that time, the Cassedys were clearly impressed. When it ceased operations as a resort, they immediately leased the Inn and welcomed their first 48 students in the fall of 1894. Two years later, National Park Seminary (NPS) was incorporated and in 1897 purchased the entire property, including buildings, farmland, and even some of the Inn's furnishings.

NATIONAL PARK SEMINARY⁸

National Park Seminary had been a long-time dream of the Cassedys, who had previously run the Lasell Female Seminary in Auburn, Massachusetts and the School for Young Women in Norfolk, Virginia. Basic to the couple's educational philosophy was the belief that student life was happier, freer, and more open to learning when students were removed from the distractions and social whirl of city life. Ideally, they thought, a boarding school would be located in a rural setting, yet near enough to the city to take advantage of its educational opportunities under controlled conditions.⁹ Forest Glen was the perfect site.



The husband and wife team of John and Vesta Cassedy founded National Park Seminary.

Named for the adjacent "National Park," now called Rock Creek Park, NPS was a non-denominational boarding school for young ladies. NPS was originally open to young women ages 17 to 21, who had graduated from high school. By 1915, the school was accepting juniors, aged 14 to 16, and offered four years of high school courses and/or two years of higher education. While NPS students received a thorough education in all subjects – history, geography, mathematics, science, etc. – the school was primarily focused on producing young ladies who did not anticipate employment, but were well prepared to take their places in the highest social circles. Thus elocution, drama, literature, foreign languages, music, and the arts were strongly emphasized.

The typical school day consisted of five classes before and after lunch, ending at 5:20 p.m. After a formal dinner and a recreation period, the evening activities began. The crowded evening schedules included lectures, recitals, sorority and club meetings, plays, and, of course, homework until the bell at 10:00 p.m. The students attended these events both on the campus and in Washington, D.C., participating in regular theater and lecture trips downtown.

Mondays were reserved for forays into the city for shopping and visiting the monuments, museums, and historic sites of the nation's capital. For these trips into Washington, NPS chartered a special two-car train from the B&O Railroad, which would pick up students at the Forest Glen station early in the morning and return them in the afternoon. The capital city's cultural events and exhibits were popular with the girls, as were the many department stores and lunch at Reeves Restaurant and Bakery on F Street. When travelling into the city, students were required to wear white gloves and be attended by a chaperone. They were constantly reminded to be on their best behavior with the maxim, "Remember who you are and what you represent."

From the early 1900s, the school's needs were supplied almost entirely by train. It was not uncommon for students to arrive at school in a Pullman car and to bring personal belongings, including horses, via the railroad. Dr. Cassidy succeeded in convincing the railroad to stop all of its through trains at Forest Glen on the first day of school in September, the first and last day of Christmas vacation, and the last day of the school term. As for the rest of the year, only a few local trains would stop at Forest Glen to make milk and mail deliveries. The volume of mail delivered to NPS by the railroad was so great that the U.S. Post Office located near the station had to remain open on Sundays.



All students at National Park Seminary wore uniforms to avoid competition in dressing.

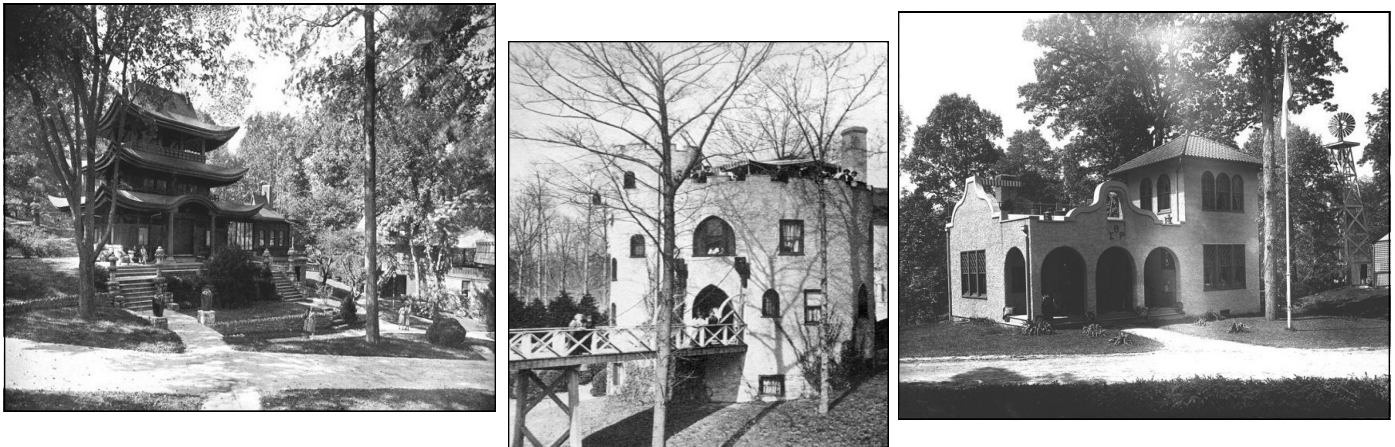
In 1912, the school year began with a radical change in daily attire. The girls had taken to over-dressing during the day in a competition to outdo each other. As principal of the school, Vesta Cassidy had worried about this distraction and recommended the wearing of uniforms. Consequently, in the fall the girls began wearing skirts and matching sailor blouses, commonly called Peter Thompsons (a manufacturer's brand name) or PTs, which were popular at many schools across the nation. Interestingly, a decade later, when the girls were asked if they wanted the dress code to continue, they voted to keep the PTs. Over the years, the length and cut of the PTs changed to follow fashion, and acceptable colors were expanded to include dark blue, light blue, and white in wool, serge, or linen depending on the season.

The school's dedication to social training is clear from its extensive sorority program, and every student was required to belong to one of the school's eight sororities. These clubs hosted teas, picnics, and dances; produced plays and operettas; competed in sporting events; and even held scavenger hunts. For each of these, they designed invitations and programs, planned the menus, and entertained their guests.

Families paid dearly for the exceptional academic and social education offered at National Park Seminary. Tuition at NPS as well as expenses such as transportation to and from school (on the train, and from all parts of the country), uniforms, field trips (including overnight stays in New York), sorority dues, horse boarding, and the like added up, making attendance at National Park a possibility for only the wealthy.¹⁰ For instance, such recognizable families as Chrysler, Wrigley, Heinz, Warner (as in Warner Bros. Studios), Hershey, and Kraft enrolled their daughters here.

THE BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS¹¹

Because the Cassedys focused on their protégées' character development, they instilled propriety through the students' surroundings, as well as through their formal education. The school's buildings and grounds abounded with paintings, tapestries, ornate furnishings, and sculptures. With the four-tiered fountain as its centerpiece, the meticulously groomed grounds of the Seminary were dotted with statuary.¹²



Each of the eight sorority houses was built in a different international style to educate the girls about the world.

Each of the sororities had its own clubhouse built in a unique style. The first sorority house built was Alpha Epsilon Pi in 1896, following a traditional American Bungalow style. By 1899, three more sorority houses had been added: Chi Omicron Pi, the Japanese Bungalow; Kappa Delta Phi, the Dutch Windmill; and Zeta Eta Theta, the Swiss Chalet. The years 1903 and 1904 saw the construction of Phi Delta Psi's Colonial House and Theta Sigma Rho's Spanish Mission, and Pi Beta Nu's English Castle. Chi Psi Upsilon's Japanese Pagoda was the last sorority house built in 1905. The houses were too small for the girls to live in; rather, they were used solely for meetings and hosting small gatherings in a home-like atmosphere.

John Cassedy had a passion for construction, and these eight unique sorority houses were just a few of the buildings added to the growing campus. With minimal work, Cassedy had transformed the old inn, renamed "Main," from hotel to a dormitory and classrooms. He enlarged the dining room and kitchen and created lounge areas and reception rooms from the former lobby. The first new building at NPS was a gymnasium, built in 1895, which reflected the importance the Cassedys placed on physical education.

The Chapel was constructed in 1898 and enlarged two times in as many decades to meet the increasing enrollment. The school's philosophy was Christian in tone, but non-sectarian. Visiting clergy held Sunday services here, or students could travel locally to services at a church of their choice. Pep rallies, which amounted to good conduct reminders, were also held in the Chapel before trips into Washington, as were lectures given by faculty or touring speakers. The beautiful stained glass windows, many of which survive, were a gift from the first NPS graduating class.

The summer of 1898 also witnessed the construction of Senior House, a multi-storied, wood shingled dormitory northwest of Main, a science and arts building adjoining the west side of Main, a new stable (far to the south to avoid the odors), and a new central steam plant near the dining room. Also in 1898, John, Vesta, and their two sons, who had been living in Main, built for themselves Aloha House, a wood frame, two-story residence. All the new buildings, with the exception of the stable and steam

plant, had shingled exteriors that matched Main, and all had gas lighting and indoor plumbing, the latter achieved by an innovative septic system. Rainwater was collected and retained for use by the steam boilers, and drinking and bathing water was drawn from deep wells by windmill-operated pumps.

The Odeon was truly the architectural gem of the campus and, in 1901, was the school's first building constructed with electricity and the first to reflect the growing popularity of the Neoclassical style of architecture. Behind its colonnaded façade, the theater seated 500 in an ornate interior. The Odeon provided fly space, an orchestra pit, scenery storage wings, and box seating. NPS was one of the few schools in the country with such an extensive theater and drama program. Recitals, plays, concerts, lectures, and baccalaureate services were held here.



The Odeon served as the impressive theater for the Seminary.

In 1907, the Cassedys built a new gym to meet the strict physical fitness program at NPS. The building housed a heated, tiled swimming pool, locker room, solarium, bowling alley, basketball court, and a mezzanine running track. The showers, or “needle baths” as they were called, were a novelty to a generation of bathtubbers in the early part of the century.

Also that year, a new dormitory, the Villa, was built across the glen to house the burgeoning student body, which would eventually reach 400 students at the height of enrollment in the 1920s. Like all buildings on the campus, it was connected to the others via an enclosed walkway. This system of walks kept the students from being exposed to the elements during inclement weather. In the case of the Villa, the walkway was called the Pergola Bridge and allowed students to either walk protected underneath it or on top of it, surrounded by sprays of climbing roses.

A CHANGE IN LEADERSHIP¹³

By 1915, National Park Seminary was known as one of the most exclusive finishing schools in the country. Fortunately, it was able to hold onto this reputation despite a lapse in leadership of several years. In 1910, Vesta Cassedy succumbed to cancer and left John a widower. A year after her passing, he began to be seen with younger women, including former NPS student Stephana Prager, a 1911 graduate. Miss Prager was 19 at the time, and John was 56, two years older than her father. To the chagrin of some members of the Cassedy family, as well as students, faculty, and staff, the couple married in her hometown of Roswell, New Mexico on June 12, 1912.

John's attentions began to turn away from NPS and toward his new bride, who wanted no part in overseeing the operation of the school. He built a spacious new home on 16th Street in Washington, from which he commuted to the Seminary. The loyal staff kept NPS on course, as they had done during Vesta's illness. The alumnae, too, proved a great asset during this period, since the majority kept an interest in the operation and general welfare of the school, believing once an NPS girl, always an NPS girl. Indeed, throughout the history of the school, alumnae took an active part in NPS affairs, an involvement that was welcomed and deeply appreciated by the school administration.

Finally, in the summer of 1916, Cassedy sold his interest in the school, ushering in a new administration, which agreed to maintain the same educational practices begun by the Cassedys. James Eli Ament, a distinguished educator, became the school's second president. His credentials included terms as superintendent of city schools in Carroll, Iowa and Rock Island, Illinois; president of the Northwestern Territorial Normal School in Alva, Oklahoma; president of the State Normal School in Warrensburg, Missouri; and principal of the Pennsylvania State Normal School in Indiana, Pennsylvania.

Ament summed up his philosophy to the incoming student body in September 1916. He told them of his strong belief in a benign and proper environment for young girls in that period of their lives when they pass from girlhood into young womanhood, and he wanted them to have and understand the finer things in life, including exposure to foreign cultures.



The Aments carried on the earlier traditions of the Seminary and expanded and embellished the eclectic buildings.

Ament immediately instituted a dramatic construction program. Virtually every existing structure was enlarged to accommodate the ever-increasing student body. All eight sorority houses were expanded with kitchens and restrooms, and the Odeon was connected to Senior House via a three-story music conservatory, named Teresa Catherine Hall in honor of Ament's wife. Main's kitchen and dining room were enlarged, and the west wing was built out for additional classroom space and a library. The Chapel, Aloha, and the Science Building were all enlarged as well. Ament unified the somewhat eclectic architecture of the campus by coating all buildings, except the sororities, with stucco. In an attempt to reflect the popular taste for Classical Revival styles, he painted everything white and added columns and pediments where he could, including on the Gym, Practice House, and the rear of Main.



The grand ballroom was well used by the girls each day and for many formal events.

The last building to be added to the campus was a ballroom designed by Ament in 1927. The soaring five-story space imbued with Gothic architectural details created a spectacular interior with stained glass dormer windows, exposed trusses, ambulatories overlooking the dance floor, and a ring of niches holding statuary around the entire room. Few educational institutions in the world had a ballroom like the one at National Park Seminary. When constructed, it was the tallest building in Montgomery County, prompting the Silver Spring Fire Department to purchase its first hook and ladder truck.

For formal dances, music was generally provided by a band or symphony; but for casual dancing (with each other) after lunch or dinner, Dr. Ament purchased an auditorium orthophonic Victrola. With its movable record player cabinet and enormous speaker built into a wall, the Victrola came at a cost of approximately \$10,000 in today's dollars. National Park Seminary was the only educational institution to own such an excessive instrument. Although the record cabinet is long gone, the walnut speaker remains in the Ballroom to this day.

During his tenure, Dr. Ament loosened some of the rigorous formalities of the school. Where the Cassedys strictly forbade interacting with young men, the school now allowed coeducational activities, including dances, attending football games, and visits to other schools. The NPS social secretary maintained a list of gentlemen callers who could be invited to the school, either by a student, or on her behalf. A young man who was not on the list could only visit after a letter from the girl's parents was received.

Ye Bluebird, located near the dining room, was originally a formal tea room. In later years, the girls could kick off their shoes and relax with a soda, cake and ice cream. As one of the few places not monitored by chaperones, the tea room became a welcome respite from the daily rigors of NPS. As the students became more liberated in the 1930s, even smoking was permitted there.

Throughout the 1920s, enrollment continued at maximum capacity, and the school was expanded several times. Ament purchased the neighboring farm, increasing National Park Seminary's property to well over 200 acres. The school was virtually self-sufficient, able to supply its own fresh beef, pork, chicken, eggs, milk, cheese, cream, and vegetables, cultivated by tenant farmers.

NATIONAL PARK COLLEGE¹⁴

Coupled with a Depression-era decline in enrollment, the school suffered a tremendous blow when Dr. Ament died in 1936, following gallstone surgery. After a year of juggling the school's financial and scholastic management, Mrs. Ament was approached by Roy Tasco Davis, a politician, ambassador, and educator, who sought to purchase the school. Relying heavily on the NPS alumnae as well as other schools where he had taught, Davis was able to enroll 150 students for the 1937-38 school year, building up the depleted student body in successive years.



Mrs. Ament remained with the school in an influential capacity. She formally announced Dr. Davis as the new president on September 11, 1937. He explained to the new students that in order for the school to survive, he would expand its educational scope, keeping its current programs that focused on social and cultural refinement, but also offering more practical training. From then on the school became known as National Park College (NPC), and a committee of advisors and educators was formed to administer a new junior college curriculum.¹⁵

As the last owner of the school, Roy Tasco Davis added more practical courses to the curriculum.

Long-standing traditions, such as the senior class tea at the White House and the rental of an entire floor of the Hotel Washington on Pennsylvania Avenue, NW to watch inaugural parades, continued

through the years. Elaborate annual celebrations, such as May Day and Senior Day, were held without fail. Halloween was an event like no other at National Park, an opportunity for teachers to pull devilish pranks on students, and seniors on younger classmates. The glen was decorated as a ghoulish walk and, late in the evening, a costume party was held in the gym.¹⁶

On March 16, 1940, the school was incorporated as a non-profit junior college for women, with a self-perpetuating board of trustees. The following year, a National Park College scholarship fund was established for students planning to attend in September 1942. However, there would be no classes held that year – or ever again at the Seminary.

THE ARMY YEARS

The United States entered World War II in the immediate wake of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Emergency legislation enacted less than two weeks after the attack entitled the federal government to seize any property it deemed necessary to support the needs of the war. In Washington, D.C., office buildings, hotels, and even large parking garages were occupied by government and military offices. Nor were schools immune to takeover; the Mount Vernon Seminary campus in Washington was taken for the Navy's use immediately following passage of the War Powers Act. Six months later, Arlington Hall Junior College for Young Women in Virginia was taken over. Dr. Davis was quick to offer students of these schools immediate admission to NPC and to hire some of their faculty.

Seizure of NPC was certainly a possibility, especially since officers from nearby Walter Reed General Hospital were familiar with the campus, having participated in events and served as judges at sports competitions. However, alumnae and students assumed that Davis' political power would avert such a takeover. They also pointed out that their neighboring rival, Marjorie Webster Junior College, boasted a large campus and was almost adjacent to Walter Reed.

Meanwhile, the war in Europe was intensifying and newspapers were filled with lists of patients recuperating at Walter Reed, where space in the 2,000-bed facility was becoming scarce. Although a bit apprehensive about the future, Dr. Davis went about preparing for the 1942 school year, prepaying faculty and staff and ordering supplies. He found tasks a bit more tedious than they had been the previous year, given war shortages and an increased enrollment, but the new semester was not to be.

As the nation's involvement in the war escalated, the Army Medical Services launched a program of purchasing or leasing hotels, schools, and civilian hospitals to provide beds for the treatment of anticipated casualties. More than 100 facilities were inspected by the Surgeon General, and 28 were taken for use by the Army.¹⁷ In the Washington, D.C. area, the staff from Walter Reed surveyed several apartment buildings for possible use by the hospital—a move that was unpopular in wartime Washington, where housing an influx of war workers had contributed to an acute housing shortage.¹⁸

It is not known if the Seminary was considered during these inspections but, in August 1942, the War Department handed down condemnation proceedings for the entire campus of National Park College. Dr. Davis is said to have initially fought the action, but his attempts to save the school were futile. A letter was issued to the students announcing the takeover and, on September 3, 1942,



Soldiers replaced students on the campus after the takeover by the Walter Reed General Hospital. Source: U.S. Army

National Park College became an official annex to the Walter Reed General Hospital.¹⁹ The few stunned students who had returned for the new semester were shuffled off by armed soldiers to the old French parlor in the Main building, which had become the Army Information Office.

Although quite upset, many alumnae and students felt that if the school had to close, it was for a good cause. But, in fact, the closing of National Park College was as much of a shock to them as the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Dr. Davis immediately went about finding new schools for his students and placing 36 of his 45 teachers at other colleges. He created new contracts with the Army for the kitchen, landscape, and housekeeping staffs. The government paid \$855,000 for the entire campus, including 186 acres and associated buildings, but Davis suffered some financial losses because the school had been well-stocked for the coming term, expenses for which there was no reimbursement.²⁰

Late that September, many more students, faculty, and alumnae, now fully aware that their beloved school was closed, returned to the college for an auction that ran for several days. More than 500 treasures from the beautifully decorated interiors were sold, including antique furniture, paintings, sculptures, Persian rugs, clocks, mirrors, Tiffany lamps, chandeliers, desks, 22 pianos, and other items. The Army retained the four-poster beds for use in the wards, and the school's china and silver went to the officers' mess.

Renovations to the school began promptly as the Army went about changing the buildings to serve as recuperation and rehabilitation space for veterans. Inside the buildings, the original ornate wood stairs were replaced by fireproof concrete stairwells, carpet was replaced with linoleum, and the wainscoting, mahogany ceilings, bracketed columns, and trim were painted hospital colors of yellow, white, or lime green.²¹ Upgraded power, water, and sewer lines were installed to accommodate the growing capacity, and the dining room and kitchen were renovated to serve larger numbers of meals.

Parlors and classrooms became hospital wards and therapy rooms, the Gym was converted to a movie theater, and the Ballroom served as the recreation center with a stage added for USO shows. The Stable became a patient ward, the sorority houses were converted into officers' housing, and the Villa was used as the nurses' quarters. By the time the



The Army band entertained the wounded soldiers in the ballroom where the students once danced. Source: U.S. Army



The Walter Reed Annex at Forest Glen was the Army's main center for developing prosthetics for amputee soldiers. Source: courtesy Bonny Marquardt

renovations were completed, the Army had spent nearly \$920,000 – more than was originally paid for the entire property.²²

The Forest Glen Annex of the Walter Reed General Hospital officially opened for patients on January 20, 1943, served by six doctors, three dentists, dozens of nurses, 13 physiotherapy aides, two occupational therapy aides, eight volunteer Red Cross nurses' aides, and a number of administrative personnel. The 500-bed facility was expanded later that year to accommodate 970 beds and could house up to 1,100 patients, if necessary.

Walter Reed primarily served amputees and did not send patients to the Forest Glen Annex until they were able to walk, due to the lack of elevators. In addition to stair climbing and negotiating the topography of the site, amputees practiced such basic tasks as boarding public transportation, using a replica trolley car donated by the Capital Transit Company. The Army's prosthesis laboratory was located at Forest Glen, and new technology was developed from the trials and errors of patients using their artificial limbs.

The Annex was a busy place with much patient turnover. As noted in Walter Reed's annual report, "admissions recorded at the Convalescent Section were 7537 patients for 1944. Of these patients, 1624 were discharged on Certificates of Disability for Discharge; 1501 were returned to duty; 606 went back to retirement status; and 3118 were transferred to other installations, including the Reconditioning Section at Beltsville, Maryland."²³ These high numbers of wounded soldiers would not be seen again after World War II. While Forest Glen served the Army as a physical rehabilitation facility quite well, it treated far more behavioral health patients during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

The campus underwent significant physical change throughout the years of Army use. During the 1940s, the school's Recitation House, steam plant, water tower, and greenhouse were demolished. This may have precipitated a 1947 proposal to raze all the structures at the Seminary to make room for a new 1,000-bed hospital, barracks, housing, and other support facilities, a plan which fortunately was not carried out.²⁴ However, the most lasting change, which would forever alter the peaceful, sylvan environment of Forest Glen, was the construction of the Capital Beltway. Built in the mid-1960s, it brought a constant rattle and hum, rendering Forest Glen all but unsuitable for quiet recuperation.

For many years after World War II, the National Park Alumnae Association and Dr. Davis petitioned the federal government to release the property, but to no avail. Reopening the school at a different site was considered, but all agreed that the only fitting place was the old glen. In his later years, Davis lived with his family in Glencoe House, across the street from the Pagoda and overlooking the campus, where he passed away in 1975.

Over time, the bucolic setting was gradually eroded through the construction of an Army landfill, motor pool, athletic facilities, helicopter landing pad, and institutional buildings such as laboratories, a nuclear test reactor, and numerous support facilities.²⁵ When the Army planned in the early 1970s to locate a medical waste incinerator on the campus to be used by Walter Reed, the National Naval Medical Center, and the National Institutes of Health, the community began to recognize the importance of protecting this unique site. While the incinerator idea was dropped, a far worse proposal was looming.

In 1972 the Army revised the Master Plan for the Forest Glen Annex to recommend either demolition of all the old buildings and construction of Army housing, or vacating the site. Responding to public outcry at the possible loss of the old buildings and grounds to new construction, the National Capital Planning Commission appointed a Forest Glen Task Force to study the historic character of the campus and determine appropriate, feasible reuses.²⁶ Before the feasibility study was even completed, however, the site was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the National Park Seminary Historic District, which effectively put any demolition on hold. Listing in the National Register afforded the site due consideration by the Army specifically for its historic architecture, requiring consultation with the Maryland Historical Trust (the state's Historic Preservation Office) and the public, making an outright decision to demolish a more challenging proposition. The property was subsequently listed in the Montgomery County Master Plan as a historic district in 1979, necessitating further review by the county's Historic Preservation Commission.

The National Park Seminary Feasibility Study was released to the public in January 1973. Preservation of the deep, heavily forested glen, which nearly a century earlier was the source of the region's name, was considered to be of utmost importance. Interestingly, the study determined that some of the structures dating from the Ament era detracted from the simpler, picturesque quality envisioned by the Cassedys and should be demolished. Even Ament's magnificent Ballroom was recommended for demolition, though many now consider it the focal point of the site.

The Army rescinded plans to demolish or vacate the historic district, and occupancy remained at full capacity as America's involvement in the Vietnam War raged on. However, following completion of the new hospital at the main post of Walter Reed in 1978, all patients and clinics and most of the offices were moved there. For the first time since the Forest Inn closed in 1893, the glen was quiet again.

THE SAVE OUR SEMINARY ERA

Once the patients were moved from the Forest Glen Annex to the new hospital in D.C., the steady decline of the historic campus began. With only a few offices remaining, upkeep was drastically reduced, and thus began years of neglect that would have lasting implications.

Hoping to arrest some of the deterioration of the buildings, historic preservationists, alumnae, and concerned citizens in the community founded the non-profit organization Save Our Seminary in 1988. The small but dedicated volunteer group immediately began a campaign to educate the public about this important historic site and to bring pressure on the Army to arrive at a resolution for the property.

But any hopes of restoring the site were soon dashed when the Army once again revised its Master Plan, calling for demolition of many of the historic buildings and construction of more than 600 units of standard military housing. A public forum held in the old Seminary Ballroom was filled to capacity, with the majority of those in attendance vehemently opposed to the Army's proposal.

The Army's rebuttal was that the plans for new housing were preliminary only, and under revision. SOS began a letter-writing campaign, offered special tours of the site, presented slide shows to raise awareness, and maintained constant pressure on the Army to reconsider its plans. As a result, demolition proposals in the 1988 Master Plan were put on hold, as they had been once before in 1972. For the first time, the Army expressed an intention to work with the community and preservationists.



Ongoing water leaks caused serious structural damage in the empty Seminary buildings.

But that did little to aid the historic structures, as the lack of regular maintenance had caused water leaks and deterioration so severe that the buildings' structural integrity was beginning to suffer. SOS worked intensely to get federal funding for stabilization work and, in 1990, Congress authorized \$3 million for the desperately needed repairs in the historic district. However, the Army never funded the work.

In 1991 the Forest Glen Master Plan was revised again, and the Army revealed its intent to dispose of the National Park Seminary Historic District as it was no longer needed for military use.²⁷ The Army

agreed to maintain the site during the lengthy process of “excessing” a federal property, and this seemed to be a victory for preservationists. An appropriation of \$2 million was made for building upkeep, but the funds were spent almost entirely on an expensive design study for roof repairs, which were never actually carried out.



The loss of the Odeon to arson was the ultimate sign of neglect.
Source: Steven Eisen/*The Wagon Pipe*, Friendship Fire Association newsletter

During this period, the campus experienced some of its greatest losses: statues were stolen, the interiors defaced, and stained glass windows were taken from the Castle and the Chapel. The ultimate tragedy struck in September 1993 when the Odeon theater burned to the ground. Months earlier, SOS had petitioned the Army to repair the malfunctioning sprinkler system, but instead it was shut off, leading to the destruction of one of the most important buildings on the property. Fire investigators determined the cause of the blaze was arson, and SOS and Montgomery County Crime Solvers offered a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the culprits to no avail.²⁸

The loss of the Odeon was the final indignity. In the spring of 1994, SOS and the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court against the Army for demolition by neglect of the NPS Historic District.²⁹ Extensive evidence was presented to demonstrate that the Army was in violation of the National Historic Preservation Act. SOS and NTHP requested the court to order the Army to comply with the standards for maintaining an historic property. SOS even sponsored a study showing that emergency stabilization repairs would cost less than \$100,000. While the court deliberated, the Army allowed SOS to begin monthly tours of the site and funded an adaptive reuse study for the property, the first step required in the excessing process.³⁰ A year after its completion (and the accumulation of thousands of dollars worth of deterioration), the Army suddenly reversed its decision to excess the historic district and announced plans to consider keeping it.

In the fall of 1996, the court’s decision on the lawsuit was announced. The judge ruled in favor of the Army. He agreed that the Army was negligent in maintaining the property prior to 1992, but he felt it had done the best it could with repairs since then. While he admitted that current efforts were not enough to deter deterioration, as he interpreted the law pertaining to the National Historic Preservation Act, he could do nothing more to enforce it. SOS promptly appealed this decision. The court asked the parties involved to participate in out-of-court negotiations in an effort to come to terms, a routine procedure in such cases.

In July 1997, a Notice of Intent to undertake an Environmental Impact Statement, a public study required as part of the excessing process, was issued. Taking preservation of the historic buildings into consideration, the document listed four options for the Army: raze all the buildings and determine a reuse for the site; demolish some of the dilapidated structures and determine a use for the rest; rehabilitate the property; or excess it. At a public hearing reminiscent of the one held nearly a decade earlier, a large audience of neighbors, preservationists, and other concerned citizens arrived in force. The overwhelming majority of speakers voiced strong support for excessing as the only viable option. Members of the audience were vocal in their anger and disgust at the years of blatant neglect of the site and the continuous funding of meaningless studies. Clearly the Army’s need for the site had long

expired, and its presence and lack of maintenance were detrimental to the historic district and the surrounding communities.

By the fall, settlement discussions among SOS, the National Trust, and the Army reached one point of mutual agreement: the Army would terminate its ownership of the site since it could not adequately maintain it. This action terminated the Environmental Impact Statement but still required a separate environmental review before formally declaring the property excess.³¹ In the meantime, SOS initiated a cooperative agreement directly with the Walter Reed Army Medical Center allowing SOS to take a hands-on role in the preservation of the property.



Save Our Seminary restored the exterior of the Pagoda sorority house to show what could be done with other buildings on the campus.

In 1999, SOS immediately began restoring the exterior of the Japanese Pagoda sorority house, selected as one of the most visible and unique buildings on the campus. After months of volunteer labor and donations of materials, funds, and grants, the Pagoda boasted new paint and a restored roof, standing as a shining symbol of hope for saving the Seminary at the dawn of the new century.

In late May of 2001, the U.S. General Services Administration, the federal government's real estate broker, formally began the excessing process. A condition of the disposal was that a preservation easement would be placed on the entire historic district and select interiors to ensure protection in perpetuity, regardless of subsequent owners. Following the federally-mandated excessing process, GSA marketed the property first to federal agencies and then to the state and county governments, with no response. To derive some public benefit from the government-owned site, it was then offered for homeless services or educational use. The extreme deterioration of the site and the preservation that would be required were strong deterrents to public ownership and it looked as if the site would go up for bid at public auction, a prospect which SOS and others wanted to avoid considering its unknown outcome.

Recognizing that no government body would likely take on the costly project of rehabilitating the Seminary, SOS encouraged the Montgomery County government to facilitate finding the best private use for the historic site before the excess process even started. SOS knew there were qualified private parties interested in the redevelopment of the Seminary.

As the possibility of a public auction loomed – and despite its early reluctance to get involved – Montgomery County agreed to acquire the Seminary from the federal government. The deal was conditioned upon a simultaneous transfer to a private entity selected by the county. In 2003, using criteria determined years before by SOS, the county initiated a request for proposals from interested developers.³² These criteria called for the preservation of the maximum number of historic buildings and open space; public access to the site; the minimization of negative impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods; and presentation of a financially feasible plan.

In January 2004, with input from SOS, the county selected the development team of The Alexander Company and EYA to revitalize the National Park Seminary Historic District. The Alexander Company had 22 years of experience in development of historic residential and commercial properties. Although based in Wisconsin, the company had completed projects throughout the central United

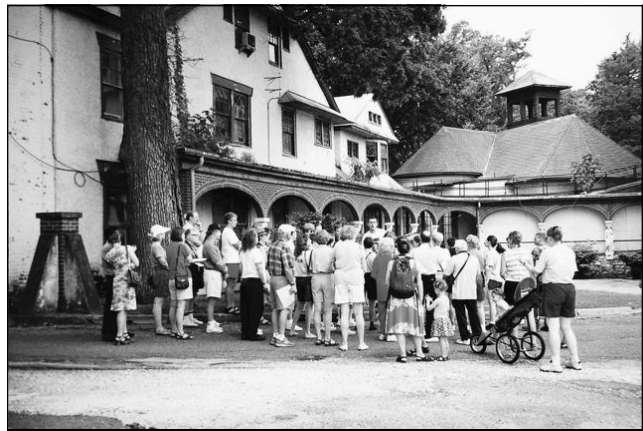
States. The local firm of EYA specialized in new construction in the Washington area. They proposed a residential use that included a mix of single-family houses, condos, and rental apartments in the historic buildings and construction of new townhomes on the former athletic fields. Community access to the Ballroom and the wooded glen was also included, as was the county requirement that a transitional home for men, which had been located in the former Stable, was to remain on the property.

Until the property officially transferred, however, the Army was still responsible for it. SOS continued its long-standing role of preservation watchdog by making regular patrols, reporting problems to the Army, and closing break-ins to the empty buildings. Unfortunately during this time, the Gymnasium and Senior House sustained significant water damage before SOS convinced the Army to turn off the water supply.

In October 2004, after a 16-year battle, SOS witnessed the transfer of the Seminary from the Army to Montgomery County and then to The Alexander Company/EYA team at an emotional ceremony in front of Aloha House. The dark period in the Seminary's history was finally over.

NEW LIFE AT NATIONAL PARK SEMINARY

After a year of preparatory work by the developers, including rezoning, site plans, building condition assessments, traffic studies, and engineering and natural resource surveys, the first shovel went into the dirt at a groundbreaking ceremony held on November 17, 2005. This celebration was attended by Governor Robert Ehrlich, federal, state, and county officials, the development team, neighbors of the Seminary, SOS board members, and a few alumnae of the school as special guests.



Guided tours educate the public about this most enchanted historic place in the county.



Save Our Seminary volunteers clean one of the many pieces of sculpture around the campus.

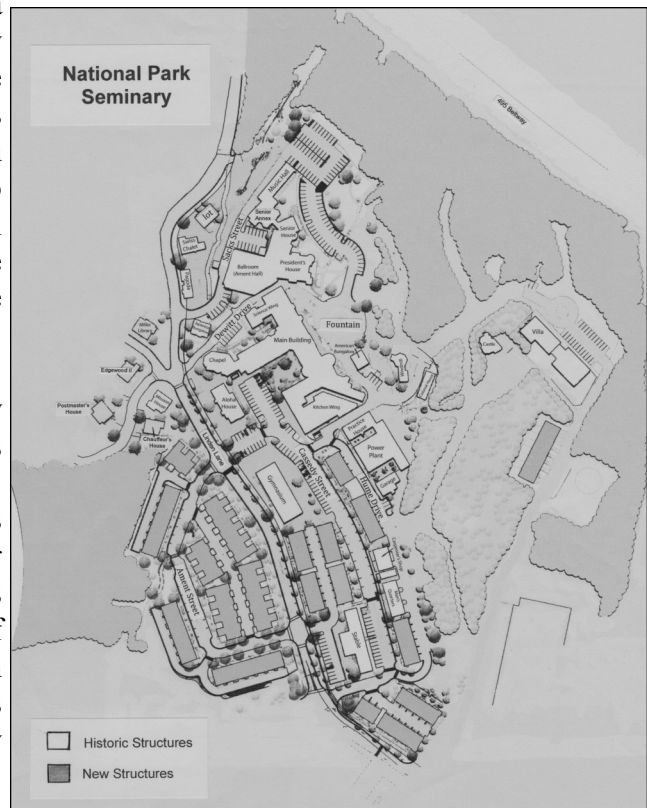
Today 18 of the 28 historic buildings are fully restored and occupied, along with ninety new townhomes whose sale helped fund the renovation of the historic buildings. A walking trail featuring historical information and photographs meanders through the site and SOS continues to lead its monthly tours, providing access to the interior public areas not otherwise open to the public.

The spectacularly restored Ballroom is the venue for SOS's quarterly programs about various aspects of the National Park Seminary and the Army history at Forest Glen. It is also becoming the place for Seminary residents to meet and hold special events as they develop as a new residential community. SOS maintains an extensive archive in the Ballroom's upper balcony as well as an office/museum in one of the former parlors off the lobby of Main.

In addition to the buildings, the National Park Seminary's historic elements include the remaining sculptures from the school's grounds. Although many pieces were lost, stolen, or destroyed during the

Army's ownership, about thirty still remain – in a variety of conditions. In 2010, Save Our Seminary embarked on a campaign to restore these sculptures, as it was not part of the developer's plan to do so. To date, five statues have been removed from storage, refurbished, and returned to their original locations on the campus. SOS will continue this multi-year project because of the importance of these sculptures as reflections of the unique character of the Seminary site.

In 2011, SOS was honored with Montgomery Preservation's Montgomery Prize for its 22 years of sustained preservation efforts on a federal, state, and local level. Although saving the Seminary is truly a preservation success story, another chapter is still to come. Ten buildings await a new life as residences, more than a dozen statues are in need of repair, and SOS's extensive archive collection needs to be cataloged so that the history of this special place can continue to be shared for many more years to come.



National Park Seminary as it looks today: a residential community with a blend of historic and new buildings. Source: The Alexander Company

About the Authors: Save Our Seminary at Forest Glen (SOS) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1988 to protect the unique historic buildings and grounds of the National Park Seminary in Silver Spring, Maryland. The mission of SOS is preserve the historic National Park Seminary and to engage the public through education and advocacy. SOS offers monthly tours March through November and quarterly programs on various topics pertaining to the history of the site. Please see www.saveourseminary.org for more information. Anne Brockett, Donald Hall, Linda Lyons, and Bonnie Rosenthal are long-time board members of Save Our Seminary at Forest Glen, and Bonnie Rosenthal is now its executive director.

Images in this article have mostly been selected from the archives of Save Our Seminary. Those from other sources are noted in the caption.

Notes

¹ Cynthia Ott. *National Park Seminary: Written Historical and Descriptive Data*. Washington, D.C.: Historic American Buildings Survey, 1998-1999), pp. 4-11.

² Forest Glen Improvement Company. *Forest Glen Park and the Forest Inn*, c. 1887 and Gordon, Irene S. *Forest Glen Park Looks Back: 1887-1987*. Silver Spring, MD: Forest Glen Park Citizens Association, 1987.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ott, p. 20.

⁵ Ott, pp. 21-22.

⁶ "Up the Metropolitan Road," *The Evening Star*, July 27, 1889 and Ott, p. 23.

⁷ *The Sunday Star*, undated (ca. 1890s). National Park Seminary clipping file, Washingtoniana Collection, Martin Luther King Jr. Library.

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, information from this section is drawn directly from Halper, Lee and Levey, Jane Freundel, eds. *Enchanted Forest Glen: The Endangered Legacy of National Park Seminary Historic District*. Silver Spring, MD: Save Our Seminary at Forest Glen, 1999. In turn, the information in this book is extracted from oral interviews with alumnae, school catalogs, *Chestnut Leaves* (the school's quarterly periodical), *The Montgomery County Story* Vol. 4, No.1; Vol. 7,

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⁹ Hartman, Susan. "Purpose of National Park College." In *The History of National Park College*, unpublished manuscript, Save Our Seminary collection, p. 8.

¹⁰ Ott, p. 33.

¹¹ See Note 8.

¹² Hartman, Susan and Snyder, Marylane. "Treasures and Curios of National Park College." In *The History of National Park College*, unpublished manuscript, Save Our Seminary collection, pp.10-13.

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¹⁹ *Realty Control File Summary, Walter Reed General Hospital (Forest Glen Section)*, 1988. The control file includes a copy of the deed for the property and the condemnation judgment, which was signed two days after the Army had begun renovations to the property.

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²⁴ "Large Pathological Hospital Is Planned," *The Service Stripe*, June 8, 1946.

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²⁷ Astore, PC under direction of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, *Final Master Plan for the Walter Reed Army Medical Center-Forest Glen Section*, September 1991.

²⁸ Burton, Lieutenant, Silver Spring Fire Department. Oral interview conducted by Richard Schaffer, July 1986.

²⁹ U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, May 17, 1994, *National Trust for Historic Preservation and Save Our Seminary v. Major General Ronald Blanck, Commander, Walter Reed Army Medical Center and Togo D. West, Jr., Secretary of the Army, U.S. Department of the Army*.

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