

**INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY/DISTRICT  
MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST  
INTERNAL NR-ELIGIBILITY REVIEW FORM**

Property/District Name: Convent of the Sisters of Visitation of Washington, Bldg 60 Survey No. M: 35-9-6

Project: Expansion of Building 10 Agency: F/NIH

Site visit by MHT Staff:  no  yes Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Eligibility recommended  Eligibility not recommended

Criteria:  A  B  C  D Considerations:  A  B  C  D  E  F  G  None

Justification for decision: (Use continuation sheet if necessary and attach map)

Building 60 at the Bethesda Campus of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is also known by its historic name as the Convent of the Visitation. The U-shaped building was constructed in 1922-23 as a cloistered monastery for the Catholic Order of the Sisters of the Visitation. Exhibiting elements of Georgian Revival, the convent was designed by A.B. Mullett and Company in consultation with Marsh and Peter. One of five convents of this order in the Washington area, it served in its religious function until the 1980s when NIH assumed ownership. The Trust and NIH agreed that the building was individually eligible for the National Register due to its religious and architectural significance.

Documentation on the property/district is presented in: NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form

Prepared by: Robinson and Associates

Lauren Bowlin 2/16/00  
Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services Date

NR program concurrence:  yes  no  not applicable

B. Kintz 8/23/00  
Reviewer, NR program Date

*[Handwritten signature]*

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA - HISTORIC CONTEXT

I. Geographic Region:

- Eastern Shore (all Eastern Shore counties, and Cecil)
- Western Shore (Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Prince George's and St. Mary's)
- Piedmont (Baltimore City, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Harford, Howard, Montgomery)
- Western Maryland (Allegany, Garrett and Washington)

II. Chronological/Developmental Periods:

- Paleo-Indian 10000-7500 B.C.
- Early Archaic 7500-6000 B.C.
- Middle Archaic 6000-4000 B.C.
- Late Archaic 4000-2000 B.C.
- Early Woodland 2000-500 B.C.
- Middle Woodland 500 B.C. - A.D. 900
- Late Woodland/Archaic A.D. 900-1600
- Contact and Settlement A.D. 1570-1750
- Rural Agrarian Intensification A.D. 1680-1815
- Agricultural-Industrial Transition A.D. 1815-1870
- Industrial/Urban Dominance A.D. 1870-1930
- Modern Period A.D. 1930-Present
- Unknown Period (  prehistoric  historic)

III. Prehistoric Period Themes:

- Subsistence
- Settlement
- Political
- Demographic
- Religion
- Technology
- Environmental Adaptation

IV. Historic Period Themes:

- Agriculture
- Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Community Planning
- Economic (Commercial and Industrial)
- Government/Law
- Military
- Religion
- Social/Educational/Cultural
- Transportation

V. Resource Type:

Category: building  
Historic Environment: suburban  
Historic Function(s) and Use(s): religious, residential

Known Design Source: A.B. Mullet and Company

**NIH Historic Resources  
Inventory Form**

M: 35-9-6

**1. Name**

Historic Name Convent of the Sisters of the Visitation of Washington

Common Name and Building Number Mary Woodard Lasker Center for Health Research and Education, Building 60

**2. Location**

Street and Number 9001 Old Georgetown Road

City, Town Bethesda

Congressional District 8

State and Zip Code Maryland 20892

County Montgomery

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present use (Government)
<input type="checkbox"/> District	<input type="checkbox"/> Public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> Laboratory
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Private	<input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> Animal Research
<input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Work in Progress	<input type="checkbox"/> Hospital
<input type="checkbox"/> Site	<b>Accessible</b>		<input type="checkbox"/> Administrative
<input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes: Restricted		<input type="checkbox"/> Support
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes: Unrestricted		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Education, Residential)
	<input type="checkbox"/> No		

**4. Owner of Property**

Name National Institutes of Health

Street & Number 9000 Rockville Pike

Telephone No. :

City, Town Bethesda

State and Zip Code Maryland 20892

**5. Location of Legal Description**

Courthouse, Registry of Deeds, etc. Montgomery County Courthouse

Liber# \_\_\_\_\_ Folio# \_\_\_\_\_

Street & Number

City, Town Bethesda

State and Zip Code Maryland 20850

**6. Representation in Existing Historic Survey**

Yes  No

Title NIH Master Plan, Phase 1; Task 5, Part II: Cultural Asset Inventory

Date September 17, 1985

Federal  State  County  Local

Depository for Survey Records

City, Town

State and Zip

M.35-9-6

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**7. Description**

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**Condition**

Excellent

Good

Fair

Deteriorated

Ruins

Unexposed

Unaltered

Altered

Original Site

Moved

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SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS

### Overview

The structure known as Building 60, or the Convent of the Visitation, was built in 1922-23 as a cloistered monastery for the Roman Catholic Order of the Sisters of the Visitation. The Convent housed an entire self-sufficient community, and therefore required specialized areas for activities and functions not found in ordinary residential units. The three-story, red-brick Convent building is sited within a walled compound. It is basically U-shaped in plan, open to the southeast; the main building block runs southwest-northeast and there are two perpendicular secondary wings. A projection on the northwest elevation indicates the location of the chapel.

### Building and Site Description

The design concept of the Convent building is conservative, and based on the architectural style called Georgian Revival which was popular during the 1920s and 1930s. This style was considered restrained and appropriate for institutional and academic settings and suited the subdued atmosphere of the Convent. Romanesque elements, which have clear symbolic associations with Roman Catholic Church architecture, were used to articulate the chapel wing and to differentiate it from the less sacred areas of the Convent. Religious symbols were incorporated into the exterior wall surfaces.

This is a two-and-one-half story brick structure on a raised basement. The gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles and is punctuated with dormers. The brick is laid in common bond, and a cast-stone belt course girdles the building at the basement level.

With the exception of those in the chapel, the windows are large 8-over-8, double-hung sashes with wooden enframements, cast-stone sills and brick jack arches. Evenly spaced windows articulate the tiny cells on the second floor; they are arranged in groups to reflect larger communal spaces used by the nuns.

On the northwest facade there is a public entrance for the chapel and a secondary entrance for the outsiders (those who did not live under the rules of seclusion, but assisted the cloistered nuns with their daily activities) and chaplain. Secluded entrances for the cloistered sisters are located behind the eight-foot wall on the southwest, southeast and northeast elevations. These entrances hold glass and wood paneled doors served by concrete steps.

The southeast elevations of the building terminating its secondary axes of the building have attached two-story wooden porches, which look out over the informal garden landscape. Doors to each level of the porches provide convenient access from each wing.

When in use, the Convent chapel was open to the public for services, and it housed a cloistered choir on the second level for the sisters. The chapel, oriented northwest-southeast was partially imbedded in the main mass of the building and partially extruded--symbolically opening itself to visitors but retaining its private status as a cloistered chapel.

The chapel wing is built of red brick with white trim and thus complements the main block of the building. However, the decorative details suggest that this section has a specialized function. Romanesque blind arcading articulates the gable end of the wing and religious motifs decorate the second-story belt course. The chapel door, centered on the northwest facade is more elaborate than the other entrances into the Convent building; the wooden raised panel double door is flanked by engaged columns supporting an arch decorated by the sacred heart motif. The two-story windows are arched double-hung sashes with cast-stone sills and wooden enframements. A wooden cupola on the roof crowns the joining of the chapel wing to the rest of the building. One stained glass window located in the southwest wall of the chapel has a heart design, a symbol of the Visitation Order, in its center. The heart is surrounded by thorns and pierced by two arrows, representing love of God and love of neighbor.

The original plan of the 1922-23 Convent building consisted of a long corridor along the interior courtyard onto which open rooms arranged along the outer walls. The original plan is largely intact today. The basement in the original scheme consisted of visitors' rooms, the kitchen dining room, and storage rooms, as well as laundry facilities. On the first floor were the linen and woolen storage rooms, the chapel (which extended two stories in height), sacristies, the priest's and caretaker's dining room, offices, the community room and other miscellaneous rooms. The juxtaposition of the screened exterior and interior parlors, also located on the first floor, allowed the cloistered nuns to communicate with outsiders without being seen. Other functional devices, such as pass-through areas for packages, assisted in maintaining the seclusion of the Order. The second and attic stories were reserved for the infirmary and the nuns' sleeping cells.

The interior finish consists of plastered walls and ceilings with tongue and groove southern pine flooring. Religious inscriptions are placed above room entrances.

Outside, the landscaping of the convent is typical of other cloistered facilities. A wall erected from architectural terra cotta surrounds the compound. The terra cotta bricks are multi-colored, in varying shades of gold and brown. Brick piers separate the sections of terra cotta brick, and the original iron gates are still used to control access onto the compound.

A winding path follows along the inside of the wall also leading past the grotto (now missing its statuary) which is located at the eastern corner of the garden.

In 1982, when the Catholic Church closed the Convent, several of its features (including shrines, the chapel altar and other religious artifacts) were removed from the Convent and relocated to new sites.

In 1984 a large new addition was made to the original Convent building to accommodate its new occupant, the Mary Woodard Lasker Center for Health Research and Education. Continuing along the same line as the original structure, the new addition then turns southeast, perpendicular to the original with another wing located parallel to the front facade. This alteration adds an inverted "C" shape to the original "U" shape.

This new addition is linked to the main building by a glass-roofed breezeway with a columned portico entrance. The addition employs the same materials and design as the original structure. This addition is

a two-and-one-half-story, brick structure on a raised basement. The gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles and hipped dormers are interspersed along the roof. The brick is laid in common bond and a cast-stone belt course runs along the building at the basement level.

**8. Significance**

Period	Areas of Significance				
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Archeology-Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Community Planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> Archeology-Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Science	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Economics	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanit	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Music	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> Exploration/Settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> Philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Politics/Government		
		<input type="checkbox"/> Invention			

Specific Dates	Architect				Builder	Area
Applicable Criteria:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A	<input type="checkbox"/> B	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C	<input type="checkbox"/> D		
Applicable Exception	<input type="checkbox"/> A	<input type="checkbox"/> B	<input type="checkbox"/> C	<input type="checkbox"/> D	<input type="checkbox"/> E	<input type="checkbox"/> F
Level of Significance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> National		<input type="checkbox"/> State	<input type="checkbox"/> Local		

SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS

### Overview

The Bethesda Convent of the Visitation (the Convent) represents one of the few fully cloistered monasteries in the Order of the Visitation community. While seclusion was a goal for which the Visitation nuns could strive, it was not written into their vows and few convents were able to afford such a luxury. The Bethesda Convent's establishment as a cloistered convent was spurred by the profitable sale of land in downtown Washington, D.C. and it served as such until the middle of the 1980s. Today, the Convent's conversion to a residential education facility for young scientists and doctors continues the tradition of a nurturing facility dedicated to contemplation, or study, albeit of a secular nature.

### Early History

The Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary was founded in France in 1610 by St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal. It was first established in the United States in Georgetown, within the District of Columbia, in 1799.

Originally conceived as a community to work among the sick and the poor, the Order developed into a community of enclosure. In order to help support themselves, the sisters took in young girls as boarders and provided them with rigorous educations. By 1777, when the Order was temporarily dissolved due to the political situation in France, there were 160 known convents in Europe. Most were located in France, and a few were scattered in Poland, Italy, and Austria. Although the Order was re-established under the reign of Napoleon I, it was harassed by the government throughout much of the 19th century.

Several events coincided in the 1790s that together encouraged the establishment of the Georgetown Visitation site in 1799. Three Carmelite sisters, the first nuns of any order to come to this country, arrived at Port Tobacco in 1790 and soon relocated to Georgetown. At about the same time, in 1792, Georgetown University was established as the first seminary in the United States to train priests. Its founders came from Philadelphia (via Maryland) and brought with them three religious women. These three women joined the Carmelite nuns already in Georgetown and founded a school to educate young women. This school was on the present site of the Visitation Monastery at 35th and P Streets. The Order of the Visitation was established in the United States at this site in 1799, and the three religious women who had joined the Carmelites became the first sisters of that order. (The Order was not officially sanctioned by the Pope until 1816; the school founded by the Order was chartered by an Act of Congress in 1828).

*Convent Life; Roman Catholic Religious Orders for Women in North America* describes the religious duties of the Visitation sisters as follows:

Contemplation; perpetual adoration; Little Office of the Blessed Virgin in choir; teaching; manual labor; private religious instruction; fostering devotion to the Sacred Heart; making altar breads and linens and vestments; printing; painting.

Contemplation was traditionally the principal function of the Order of the Visitation. However, since the vows of the Order were not as severe as other contemplative orders, its members have

also served as teachers. (It was one of the original three teaching orders for women in this country.) The Visitation Order made an important contribution to the education of young women in the 19th century. At a time when advanced education was not encouraged, this order not only taught a traditional curriculum, but also provided courses typically unavailable to women. Among these were rigorous courses in the sciences. (For instance, in the 1820s, thousands of dollars worth of scientific equipment was imported from France for the use of the girls in laboratories at the Georgetown school.)

The initial founding of the Georgetown Convent of the Visitation was the base from which 19 additional convents were established in the United States. The first branch was founded in Mobile in 1832. (*Georgetown Visitation Since 1799* gives the number of additional convents as 19, while the book entitled, *Convent Life; Roman Catholic Orders for Women in North America* lists 22 sites.

#### History of the Bethesda Convent of the Visitation

As many as five Visitation sites were established in the Maryland/District of Columbia area. The Bethesda Convent of the Visitation was one of the most recent.

Money from the sale of a Visitation school in downtown Washington led to the establishment of the Visitation Convent in Bethesda. The site, near Connecticut Avenue and Desales Street, was originally purchased in 1876 and was the location of a Visitation school for many years. By the early 20th century enrollment had declined, and the school and site were sold in the 1920s. Proceeds were used to establish a small convent in Bethesda for Visitation sisters who wished to live literally by the ultimate goal of seclusion and contemplation.

A brief history of the Convent appears in a document prepared in December 1983 by the National Institutes of Health's Division of Space Management:

... The enrollment of the school [at Connecticut Avenue and Desales Street in Washington] began to decline and the properties that had been acquired were sold and sufficient funds were received that enabled the nuns to build and endow a monastery, where they could live the normal life of the Order without the worldly distractions of a school.

The Convent, as constructed in 1923, and as it remains today, consists of a three-story brick structure containing approximately 43,000 gross square feet. The exterior construction of the building is brick masonry, and the roof is asbestos shingle. The interior finish consists of plastered ceilings, and 18" thick plastered walls, with tongue and grove [sic] southern pine flooring. The building, originally heated with coal, had two Burnham gas boilers installed in 1930 to provide steam heat. There is no air conditioning. The Convent is serviced by a 2500-pound Otis elevator that runs from the basement level to the second floor.

In addition, an attendant structure, known as the cottage, was erected for use as a dwelling for the Convent priest and a caretaker.

Because a cloistered order is secluded from distractions of the world, it was necessary to be self-sufficient in all aspects of their lives. The Sisters maintained two gardens, harvested, preserved and stored their own food using a root cellar to store some of the vegetables. They raised cattle and poultry for meat, eggs, and dairy products. The Sisters did their own cooking, laundry and sewing.

An infirmary was established to care for their routine medical needs. It had a dentistry room with an x-ray machine.

There was a cemetery located at the Convent. Prior to the sale of the property, the bodies of 23 Sisters were exhumed and re-interred in other Catholic cemeteries.

General maintenance of the Convent was provided by volunteer caretakers, one of whom helped build the Convent and until recently, was still helping the Sisters.

The Chapel was opened to the Public for Church services with a secluded area for the Sisters. To assist The Convent nuns with the day-to-day activities of receiving visitors, accepting deliveries, and taking care of the Chapel, there were non-cloistered nuns called "Outsisters." They were secluded from The Convent nuns, living in separate quarters and taking their meals separately.

In 1949, 50 of the original 61 acres associated with the Convent were purchased [by NIH] from the Sisters of the Visitation for \$173,058, which provided the NIH with sufficient land to construct the Warren G. Magnuson Clinical Center. At that time, the remaining 11 acres were not purchased because it was the site of the Convent, which was occupied.

In 1971, the Catholic Church relaxed the strict rules of The Convent order and the visual barriers of seclusion between the nuns and the outside world were removed.

In October of 1982, the Catholic Church decided to close the Convent, relocate the remaining Sisters to other communities and offer the property for sale. At that time, only nine of the original cloistered Sisters remained. Because of their age, other Sisters had been brought in over the years to care for them. All of these Sisters were relocated to other communities of their choice, keeping two or three together at each location.

Because this property was the only remaining undeveloped privately owned

land, almost entirely engulfed by the NIH campus, negotiations were initiated by NIH to acquire it.

At the time of its establishment in the 1920s, the Convent had the only Catholic Chapel in Bethesda. Until a church was built approximately three years after the Convent was completed, the Convent chapel was the place of Catholic worship for the public. It continued in this capacity to a smaller extent after completion of the new church.

### The Architects

The Bethesda Convent was designed in 1922-23 by A.B. Mullett and Company in association with Marsh and Peter. Both are architectural firms of stature in the Washington, D.C. area.

A.B. Mullett and Company was the private architectural practice established by nationally renowned architect Alfred B. Mullett after he resigned his post as Supervising Architect of the Treasury. Mullett's prominence derives from his long public service as Supervising Architect (1866-1874). While in this position, during the early part of his career, he was responsible for the planning and direction of significant federal buildings nationwide. He is best known for his giant structures in the Second Empire style. Major structures from this period of his career include the State, War and Navy Building (Old Executive Office Building) in Washington, D.C., and the Custom House, Court House, and Post Office in St. Louis.

After his resignation from the post of Supervising Architect, Mullett was joined in private practice by his two sons Thomas A. and Frederick M. Mullett, and by J.F. Denson. The firm Alfred B. Mullett and Company designed commercial offices, houses, hospitals, a few chapels and theaters, and other structures in the city of Washington. These include the Central National Bank (Sears House), the Baltimore Sun Building, the Mexican Legation (demolished), the residence of General Noah L. Jeffries (the Nigerian Embassy), the new National Theater, and the Logan Memorial Chapel (the tomb of General John A. Logan). The sons obtained their architectural training in the offices of their father, and following his suicide in 1890 they continued the practice.

The Convent of the Visitation was designed by this successor firm after the elder (and more noted) Mullett's death. Biographical material on Mullett's son Thomas Mullett contained in *Withey's Biographical Dictionary of American Architects* indicates that he was responsible for the design of "the Visitation Monastery in Alta Vista, Maryland" (the Bethesda Convent).

The associated architects for the Convent were Marsh and Peter, the noted Washington architectural firm. Born in 1868, into a prominent Washington family, Walter Peter studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was then employed for a number of years as a draftsman in the well-known architectural firm of Hornblower and Marshall in Washington, D.C. In 1889, he joined with William J. Marsh (who had also acquired his architectural training with Hornblower and Marshall) to form their own architectural practice. Their important commissions in the Washington area include the First Church of Christ Scientist, the Evening

Star Building, Walter Reed Army Hospital (a unit built prior to 1908), the D.A.R. Administration Building, and several large residences. In addition, they designed the Georgetown Preparatory School, described in *Old Bethesda and Bethesda Not So Old* as one of the notable 20th-century structures in Montgomery County, Maryland.

Marsh and Peter typically designed in the neo-Georgian style, the style of the Convent, but are not known for their religious architecture. According to a Marsh and Peter scholar, Howard Berger, the design of the Bethesda Convent is not among the most fully developed of the firm's designs. From a chronology of their lives, it is known that they did not travel in the U.S. or to Europe to study convent architecture before working on this design. No other ecclesiastical architecture has been attributed to the firm to date. An interview with Sister Margaret Mary, a Visitation nun who entered the Bethesda convent in 1930, sheds some light on the working relationship between the Sisters and the architects.<sup>1</sup> Sister Margaret Mary remembers hearing that the architects were instructed to abide by the architectural guidelines stated in *Custom Book and Directory for the Religious Sisters of the Visitation of Holy Mary* that lays out recommendations for building design passed down from France since the 17th century (see description in next section of text below). Apparently, the Sisters were quite clear that they wanted their new convent to be as close to the monastery described in the *Custom Book* as possible.

The firm of Marsh and Peter continued until Marsh's death in 1926. Walter Peter continued to practice, and in 1930 he designed the Peter Estate (now part of the National Institutes of Health) for his brother George Freeland Peter.

### Typical Architectural Features of Visitation Convents

Visitation Convents were expected to adhere to some of the guidelines proscribed in the *Custom Book and Directory for the Religious Sisters of the Visitation of Holy Mary*. The dictates in this volume have their origins in 16th-century France, were reprinted in Annecy in 1850, and were translated into English in 1867. This volume (among other things) lays out recommended elements of building design and construction for the Order of the Visitation. It includes recommendations as general as "the buildings shall be constructed solidly, but simply 'a la Capucine,' without ornament on the roofs or elsewhere" to details as specific as "the plan shall be followed as closely as possible, especially as to the measure of the doors, windows, and other things mentioned in the explanation of the said plan." The placement of names of saints and sentences from the Holy Scriptures was directed in appropriate spots and the sisters were expected to stencil these decorations themselves, as they did at the Bethesda Convent.

To some extent, the Sisters at each Visitation site tried to meet the exacting requirements of the *Custom Book*, but their ability to do so varied. Due to the economic implications of being a cloistered community, few Visitation sites could afford to do so. The profitable sale of land downtown may have been the enabling factor for the Bethesda Convent to instruct their architects to follow the *Custom Book* closely.

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Sister Margaret Mary and Sister Maida-Anne, by Regina Arlotto, February 9, 1996.

Regardless of their date of construction, several things appear common to the design of Visitation convents in the Maryland/Washington, D.C. area. There is no standardized exterior design; that is, the convents vary in their exterior design as dictated by their architect, location and time period. In the Washington Metropolitan region, for example, there are structures in the Greek Revival, Georgian Revival, Second Empire, Federal and Romanesque styles.

Building interiors are generally modest in design, as befitting the simple lifestyle required of the sisters and as prescribed in the *Custom Book*. Interior design is closely related to the functions the spaces filled. Public or semi-public spaces typically include a chapel, sacristies, priest's and outsiders' dining rooms, exterior and interior parlors. Living quarters are comprised of rows of individual sleeping rooms (or cells), refectory, community room, etc. Work spaces include vestment rooms or wardrobes, laundry, sewing rooms, pantries and kitchens. (See the floor plans for the Bethesda Convent at the end of this section of the Inventory.)

Some interior spaces were particular to the needs of a cloistered community. These include: separate screened areas for the chapel and Sister's choir, screened exterior and interior parlors, turnstiles for packages, and screened openings in exterior doors. Many of these typical elements still exist in the Convent.

Because the Order of the Visitation is a community of enclosure, provision was made for outside communication without actual contact (since Vatican II, the barriers are less severe and are purely symbolic--the sisters do not so literally cloister themselves). This was by means of functional devices such as separated rooms for out-sisters, pass-through areas, and screened exterior and interior parlors.

The landscaped gardens outside the convents are of particular importance to the Visitation Order, especially for those who lived in a cloistered facility. According to Sister Maida-Anne of the Georgetown Visitation convent, the sisters at Bethesda used the garden for exercise and prayer. Both activities were crucial to the lives of the Sisters who lived in seclusion. The garden offered a peaceful, beautiful escape for the sisters who could not venture outside the wall.

#### **Comparative Descriptions of Other Visitation Sites in the Maryland/Washington Area**

Several Visitation convents are located in the vicinity of the Bethesda Convent. They vary in date from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century.

Specifically, in Maryland and the District of Columbia, *Convent Life; Roman Catholic Religious Orders for Women in North America* in 1964 listed five sites: 1500 35th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. (51 nuns; teaching academy and junior college); 9001 Old Georgetown Road, Bethesda, Maryland (21 nuns); 5712 Roland Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland (27 nuns; teaching kindergarten and elementary school); Mount de Sales, Catonsville, Maryland (27 nuns; teaching high school); and 200 E. Second Street, Frederick, Maryland (26 nuns; teaching kindergarten and elementary school).

Three of the above sites have received some historic recognition: The original Georgetown Visitation Convent is a Category II Landmark in the District of Columbia. It is also an important structure within the Georgetown Historic District (a National Historic Landmark and a National Register District). The Mount de Sales convent and school are listed on the National Register. And the Frederick Convent is within the Frederick National Register District.

**Georgetown Visitation Convent, 1500 35th Street, N.W., Washington D.C.**

Of all the Order of the Visitation sites, clearly the most important is the one in Georgetown. As the site of the first Visitation school and convent building in the United States, it is the base from which all other Visitation academies and convent buildings in this country were organized. The daughters of several Presidents and other nationally prominent women were educated there. It has remained an active site since its founding in 1799.

Materials in the files of the Historic American Building Survey give a brief history and description of the Georgetown Convent. It is described as a large complex of approximately 20 buildings, including a chapel, monastery, academy and educational structures built over the 180-year period since the Convent's establishment. The oldest extant building on the grounds is an 18th-century structure, probably the overseer's house for the Burleigh Plantation which was purchased for the Convent site. The first convent buildings were on the site of the academy building (designed by Norris Starkweather in 1873) which today faces 35th Street. The oldest extant building related to the Order is the stuccoed wood and brick chapel, erected in 1821. Although gutted by fire in 1993, the first school building dates from 1823. The school building was restored to its original design and reopened in early 1995.

Currently the chapel, academy building, and convent building hold separate identities, but are part of an attached complex; they have a prominent location, fronting on 35th Street, N.W. The secluded section of the Convent which houses the sisters was built in the 1850s and closely resembles, on the exterior, the convents at Mount de Sales and Frederick. It is simple in plan and lacks ornamentation. The chapel lies just to the north of the convent building, and the more elaborate Second Empire academy is to the north of that. The Georgetown site is large, and includes (besides buildings listed above) a gym, library, tennis courts, classroom buildings, etc.

Comparisons can be drawn between the Georgetown and Bethesda Convents. Although they were erected 70 years apart, both were designed with similar functional concepts and space arrangements in mind. These concepts were clearly prescribed by St. Francis de Sales and were passed down over the centuries in the *Custom Book*, which was written and kept by convents as a guide to their everyday life. Thus, it is not unusual that both the Georgetown and the Bethesda Convents should have similar spaces. The Georgetown convent building, however, is simpler in architectural articulation and is not as elegant as the convent building at Bethesda. This is as much due to the fact that the building in the 1850s as it is to the lack of funds to build a more well-appointed structure.

**Baltimore Academy of the Visitation, 5712 Roland Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland.**

The convent building and its attached chapel are the only surviving structures of the Baltimore Academy of the Visitation. These buildings were constructed, in the early 1920s, when the

prestigious Baltimore Academy moved to Roland Park from a downtown site where it had been located since 1837. This represented, in part, a post-World War I trend in Baltimore by the socially elite to move to outlying suburbs. As they left, the institutions that they patronized also moved.

The academy was the subject of a brief study in the mid-1980s, which was undertaken when an adaptive reuse of the buildings was proposed. Historic information on the structures was compiled in a Significance Statement (dated April 1, 1982) prepared by staff of the Baltimore City Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation. That report cites the Academy's significance for reason of "its architecture and its association with the long and important history of the Baltimore Academy of the Visitation." Prominent Maryland family names were on the school roster for many years.

The convent and chapel building are described in the report as follows:

The existent convent and chapel building were constructed in 1927 on a 12-1/2 acre site in the Poplar Hills neighborhood of northern Baltimore City. The architect was Frank L. Baldwin, the son of E. Francis Baldwin, an important Baltimore architect. The symmetrical Romanesque design features two bell towers, dormers on the slate-covered roof, and round-arched openings on the arcaded, multi-level rear veranda. The building in "T" shaped with the chapel located in the rear section. The bell, six European stained-glass windows, shrines, 250-year-old furniture, and flowers were relocated from the old site to the new buildings and grounds.

Of the five sites listed in the Maryland/Washington, D.C. vicinity, the Baltimore Convent (1927) and Bethesda Convent (1922-23) are the only two that date to the early 20th century. This proximity of dates invites a comparison of the two structures in order to put the Bethesda structure into context. While both convent buildings served like functions, as a domicile for the sisters, they differ in the execution of their design. One reason for this is simply the choice of architectural style. The Bethesda Convent was built in the neo-Georgian style, while the Roland Park one was designed in a Romanesque form. Today it is difficult to make comparisons about any interior physical similarities that may have once existed. The Roland Park Convent has been heavily altered by an adaptive reuse project which converted both the chapel and the convent building into condominiums. While the exterior of buildings appears basically unchanged except for the addition of balconies on one side and some minor changes to the doors and window sashes, the interior has been severely altered, such as the cells and the chapel dome (today the chapel dome serves as a living room for one of the condominiums).

The fact that the two convents were constructed within a few years of each other may be by coincidence only; there appears to have been no major expansion or transition in the Order of the Visitation at this time that warranted the construction of additional ecclesiastical structures. In addition, interviews with Catholic scholars indicate that there were no particular events within the Church in the early 20th century which would have influenced architectural design. That is, the buildings do not appear to represent an important transition in church architecture. Their

designs are simply reflections on the talents of their architects, and the needs and financial state of the Visitation Order at each site.

**Mount de Sales, Catonsville, Maryland.**

Mount de Sales, while no longer a Visitation convent, was begun by Sisters arriving from the Georgetown Visitation Academy. The Sisters started this school in the early 1850s. The Mount de Sales convent was nominated to the National Register in 1986. This nomination form includes two notable structures, the Academy building and the Gate House. The site is important for its architectural, religious and educational significance. According to information contained in a Maryland Historical Trust Inventory Form, the Gate House was constructed in the 1850s and used as the priest's and caretaker's residence. The Academy building is a complex and massive Greek Revival structure, 22 bays across the front facade, which was built in two stages. The first portion was built in the 1850s and used as the academy building, chapel, and dormitory. In 1882, the building was doubled in size by noted Baltimore architect E.F. Baldwin. This addition served solely as the convent building. The enlargement had been planned from the building's inception, but was not erected until adequate funding was available. The addition had not been altered since its erection except for the addition of mechanical features (lighting, elevators, and modern plumbing). Although its functional spaces closely matches those of the Bethesda site, they are arranged in a different plan so as to match the existing 1850s structure.

The chapel, which is in the earlier portion of the building, is thought to be the oldest surviving place of Catholic worship in Baltimore County. The academy was first in the county to offer education to young women of all denominations. Near the main structure lie an infirmary, smoke and ice house, and summerhouse.

The convent wing now houses the library and archives for the Academy and the school continues under a board of directors, since the school is no longer run by Visitation nuns. The building has been undergoing exterior renovations, in a piecemeal fashion, as grant money becomes available.

**Frederick Academy of the Visitation, 200 East Second Street, Frederick, Maryland.**

The Frederick academy was founded by the Sisters of Charity in 1824. In 1846, the Sisters of Visitation took stewardship of the site when the Sisters of Charity moved to Emmettsburg. The earliest extant building dates to 1827. The chapel and dormitory wings were erected between 1853 and 1857 in the Federal style. In appearance and plan, this convent is reminiscent of the Mount de Sales Convent and Academy and the convent portion of the Georgetown site. Indeed, many of the extant buildings date to the same period, the mid-19th century. The Frederick site, however, is much smaller. It is within the Frederick National Register Historic District.

Stronger comparisons can be drawn between this site and the Georgetown and Catonsville sites than between it and the Bethesda site. Not only does it date to the 19th century, but it is also a teaching site. Though the functional concepts of the convent buildings are the same, the Bethesda site is more modern and well-appointed.

All of these convents contain features unique to convent life. The Bethesda Convent of the Visitation was the only local cloistered Visitation convent and featured many elements unique to

cloistered convents. It is clear, however, that the Bethesda Convent of the Visitation stands out as testament to another era and lifestyle within the Catholic religious orders.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS

**10. Geographical Data**

Verbal Boundary Description

The proposed boundary encompasses the building and land contained within the brick wall at the southwest, southeast, and northeast sides of the convent and the circular driveway on the northwest side.

**11. Determination of Eligibility to be Included into the National Register**

Eligible

Not Eligible

SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS

**12. Form Prepared by**

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Organization Robinson & Associates, Inc.

Date March 6, 1996

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Approved by the NIH Federal Preservation Officer

Concurrence of State Preservation Officer

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**Determination of Eligibility**

Building 60, the Mary Woodard Lasker Center (the Convent), has significant architectural and historical associations as outlined below and justified in the discussion that follows. This resource **appears to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, under Criteria A and C at the national level of significance.** The relevant National Register criteria, as listed in the *National Register Bulletin 16* (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Interagency Resources Division), read as follows:

The quality of **significance** in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A. **that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or . . .**
  
- C. **that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or . . .**

The Convent has been recognized by the Maryland Historic Trust and the National Institutes of Health as having the potential for listing in the National Register. The Convent had a unique status within the Visitation Order of being one of a very limited number of strictly contemplative facilities in the United States, and it was the only cloistered facility for Visitation nuns in the area.

**Criterion A - Historical Association**

The Convent was built to house the Visitation nuns who sought to fulfill their vows of seclusion. Nationally, the Visitation Order was known primarily for its role in the education of young women, although a cloistered life was an original goal of the Order. The vow of total seclusion was often dismissed in favor of the Visitation convent's need to be self-sufficient. Therefore, most Visitation Convents throughout the country took on the responsibilities of a school in order to be financially secure. Due to its status as a nonteaching, strictly cloistered facility, the Bethesda convent was an anomaly in the Visitation Order.

In the United States, the Order of Visitation is divided into two categories. The First Federation of North America contains those convents which are cloistered monasteries. The Second Federation of North America are those convents which maintain an outside apostolate, such as a school. The Bethesda Convent's association with the First Federation of North America is very significant due to its unique status. At its peak (during the late 1950s), the First Federation included just nine convents, and today numbers only four.

### Criterion C - Design Significance

The Convent was built specifically to the guidelines described in the *Custom Book* for a cloistered monastery. As such, it included such important architectural details as a chapel (divided for the cloistered sisters and the public or outsisters), turnstiles (for receiving deliveries) and a large garden, used by the cloistered nuns for prayer and exercise. The architects of the Convent are regionally recognized "masters" and their design was faithful to an age-old tradition for a cloistered facility. This singular design fulfills Category C with its distinctive characteristics of a method of construction and the work of skilled architects who employed such methods solely for the edification of the nuns who would live there.

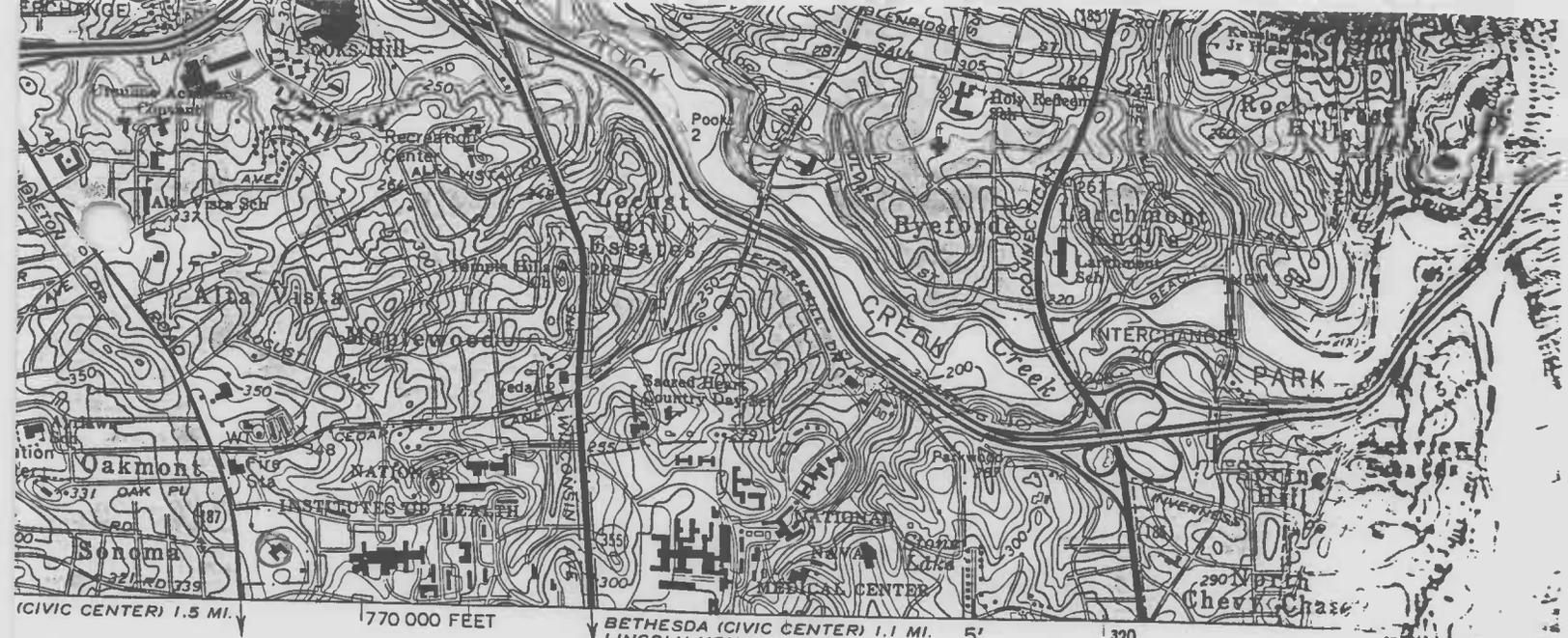
### Integrity

The National Register defines seven "aspects of integrity" that have been considered in analyzing whether the Convent conveys its historical significance. "To retain historic integrity a property will always possess several, and usually most, of the aspects."<sup>1</sup> The Convent has the potential to meet all of the aspects of integrity, as discussed below.

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| Location    | The Convent is in its original location.   |
| Design      | The architects' original exterior design, and much of the interior design has not been substantially altered. The design still adheres, as from its conception, to the guidelines described in the <i>Custom Book</i> for a building housing a cloistered order.   |
| Setting     | The original setting of the Convent has not been altered or compromised.   |
| Materials   | All of the original exterior materials and many of the important interior elements from the property's period of significance survive. (A small number of religious artifacts were removed by the order when the building was vacated.) The interior elements such as the nuns sleeping cells (now study carrels), a community room (presently a classroom) and even the scriptural quotations above the doors throughout the building are all still in place. These retained elements contribute to the contemplative feeling of the Convent. The exterior retains the red brick, stone detailing and arched windows. |
| Workmanship | The interior and exterior workmanship is still evident.  |
| Feeling     | The secluded and contemplative feeling of the Convent is still evident following the facility's conversion to an education center.   |
| Association | This building's early tie to the efforts of the Visitation nuns' quest for a complete fulfillment of their order's goals is still evident. Many of the existing features exhibit its earlier incarnation as a cloistered monastery.  |

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<sup>1</sup>"How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property," *National Register Bulletin 15*, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Interagency Resources Division, p. 45.



and published by the Geological Survey  
USC&GS, and WSSC

M:35-9-6

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



Mary Woodard Lasker Center for Health, Research and Education  
National Institutes of Health  
U.S. Geological Survey  
Washington West Quadrangle, revised 1983  
Kensington, MD Quadrangle, revised 1979

M: 35-9-6

NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form  
Building 60  
Robinson & Associates



**Figure 1.**

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
Regina L. Arlotto, January 1996  
Negative at MD SHPO  
View of Main (West) Elevation, Looking Southeast.

M:35-9-6

NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form  
Building 60  
Robinson & Associates



**Figure 2.**

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
Regina L. Arlotto, January 1996  
Negative at MD SHPO  
View of Main Entrance, Looking Southeast.

M: 35-9-6

NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form  
Building 60  
Robinson & Associates



**Figure 3.**

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
Regina L. Arlotto, January 1996  
Negative at MD SHPO  
View of Original West Wing, Looking Southwest.

M: 35-9-6

*NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form*  
*Building 60*  
*Robinson & Associates*



**Figure 4.**

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
Regina L. Arlotto, January 1996  
Negative at MD SHPO  
View of Southwest Elevation, Looking Northeast.

M: 35-9-6

NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form  
Building 60  
Robinson & Associates



**Figure 5.**

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
Regina L. Arlotto, January 1996  
Negative at MD SHPO  
View of Original Convent, Rear Section, Looking Northwest.

*M: 35-9-6*

*NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form  
Building 60  
Robinson & Associates*



**Figure 6.**

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
Regina L. Arlotto, January 1996  
Negative at MD SHPO  
View of Rear Addition, with Breezeway in Background, Looking Northeast.

M: 35-9-6

NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form  
Building 60  
Robinson & Associates



Figure 7.

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
Regina L. Arlotto, January 1996  
Negative at MD SHPO  
View of Addition, Main Elevation, Looking Southeast.

M: 35-9-6

NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form  
Building 60  
Robinson & Associates



**Figure 8.**

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
Regina L. Arlotto, January 1996  
Negative at MD SHPO  
Detail of Chapel Window, West Elevation, Looking Northeast.

M: 35-9-6

NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form  
Building 60  
Robinson & Associates

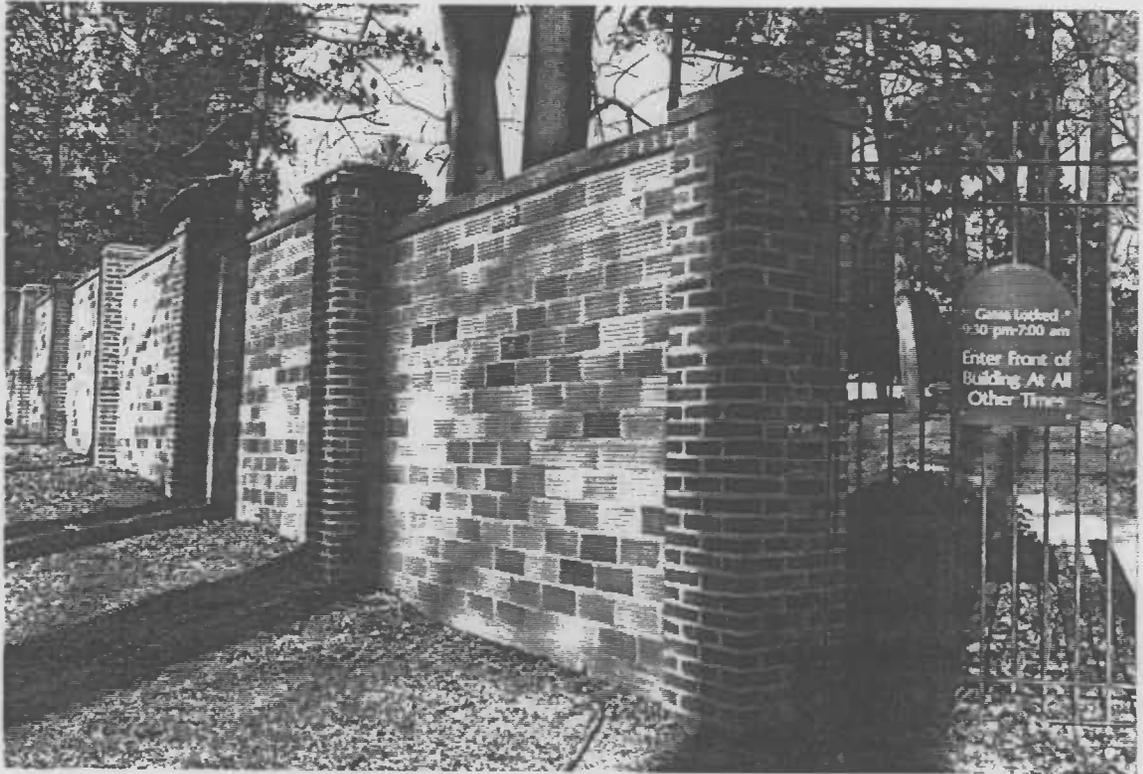


**Figure 9.**

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
Regina L. Arlotto, January 1996  
Negative at MD SHPO  
View of Garden Wall, Looking Northeast.

M: 35-9-6

NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form  
Building 60  
Robinson & Associates

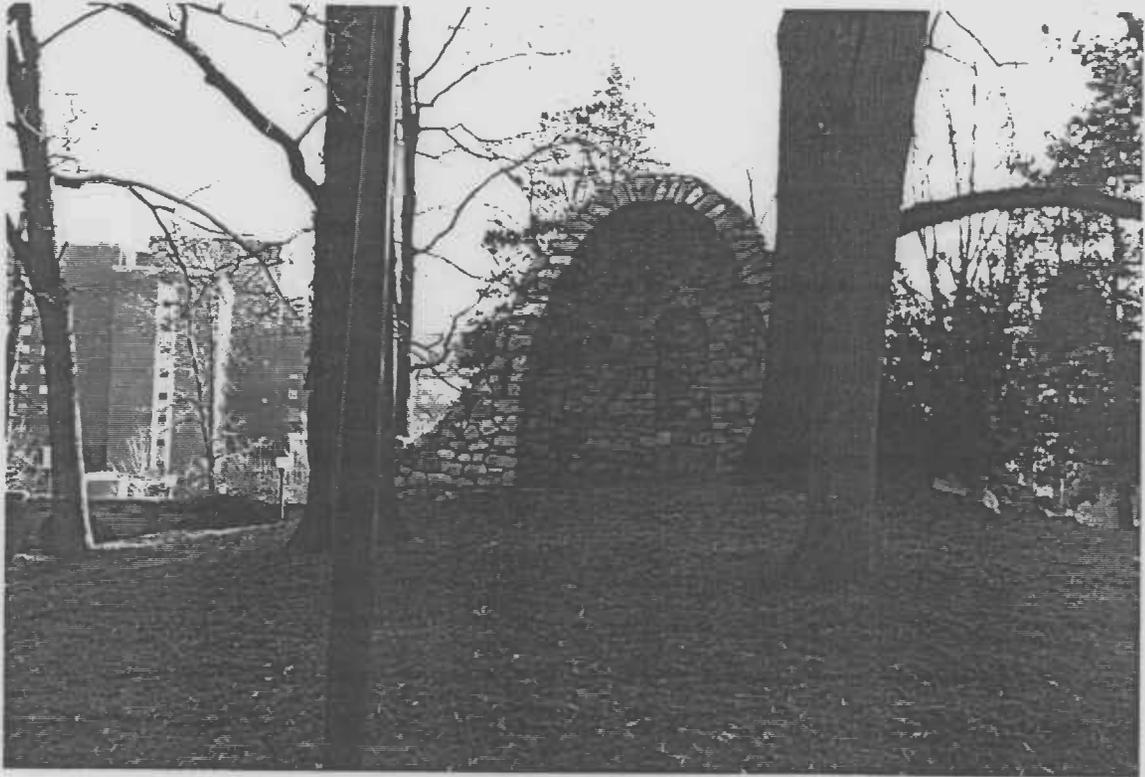


**Figure 10.**

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
Regina L. Arlotto, January 1996  
Negative at MD SHPO  
Detail of Garden Wall, with Gate, Looking Northwest.

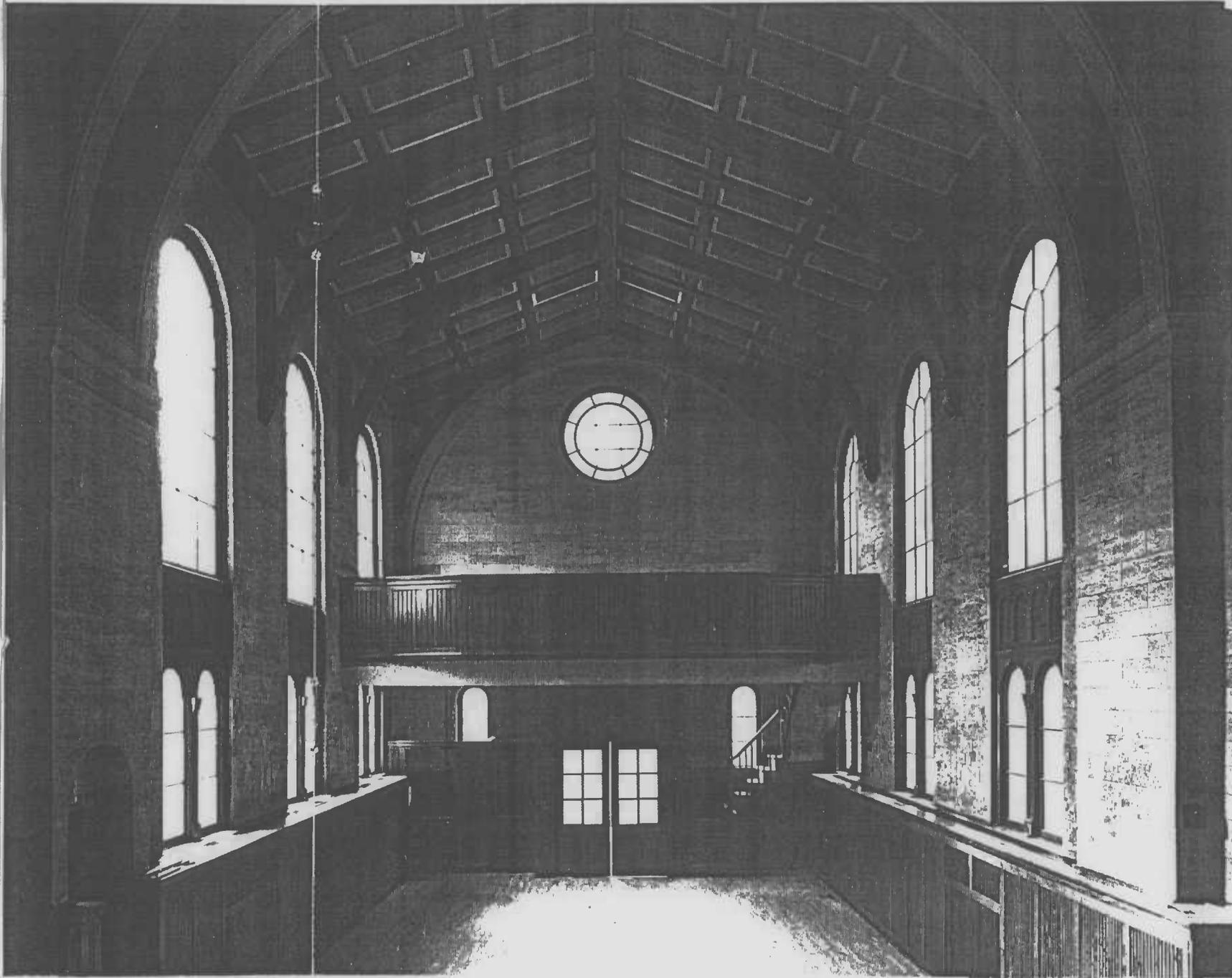
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NIH Historic Resources Inventory Form  
Building 60  
Robinson & Associates



**Figure 11.**

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
Regina L. Arlotto, January 1996  
Negative at MD SHPO  
View of Stone Grotto, Looking Southeast.



*M:35-9-6*

Figure 12.

Building 60  
National Institutes of Health  
Montgomery County, MD  
NIH Staff Photo, circa. 198  
Interior View of Chapel.