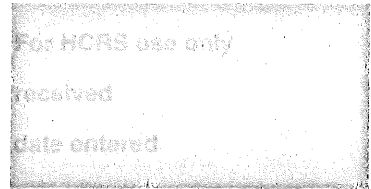


United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections



1. Name

historic Overlook

and/or common Seely's Castle

2. Location

street & number 710 Town Mountain Road not for publication

city, town Asheville vicinity of congressional district Eleventh

state North Carolina code 37 county Buncombe code 021

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. Nicholas V. Cassizzi, Overlook Christian Ministries, Inc.

street & number 710 Town Mountain Road

city, town Asheville vicinity of state North Carolina 28804

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Buncombe County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Asheville state North Carolina 28807

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

city, town state

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## 7. Description

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Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered slightly	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

---

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

"Overlook," one of Asheville's most pretentious private residences, is sited on the crest of Sunset Mountain with commanding views of downtown Asheville to the west, Chunn's Cove to the east and Tunnel Road to the south. The estate is reached from Town Mountain Road by a curving driveway that renders a full view of the southern facade, continues under a west wing, and encircles the north courtyard. In the courtyard are a fish pond and fountains which run perpendicular to the main entrance vestibule. The grounds were originally landscaped in the English country manor style and some of these plantings remain. In the fashion of the Englishman's country estate, deer roamed freely about the grounds until 1929.

The structure is oriented on an east-west axis in an asymmetrical plan. It is of hollow tile construction on a reinforced concrete foundation and is surfaced with native stone taken from Sunset Mountain. The stonework creates a tapestry effect from courses of narrow, elongated stones that are interspersed with larger irregular stones.

Asheville tradition maintains that the building is a reproduction of Forde Abbey, Dorset, near London, a mid-twelfth century monastery with Abbot's Lodging dating from the sixteenth century. The central tower of the Abbot's Lodging provides the best comparison, if any, to Overlook. Both structures are of stone construction in the English Gothic style, and are accented by parapets, lattice windows, and stone trim. Rows of windows above an entry arch are the only other similarity. Overlook does not appear to follow the Forde Abbey as a direct plan. A later owner of Overlook visited Forde Abbey and, as a layman, did not see any obvious similarities in the two structures. He suggested that if there was a design coordination, it would be in the general appearance to the front of the Abbey.<sup>1</sup>

The facade is in two main sections, the tower and rectangular block (which contains the Great Hall), on the south elevation. This entire section is capped with a parapet which has projecting merlons. The facade of the rectangular block is divided into two bays by the chimney. The chimney, a smooth arc projecting from the wall, is capped with five simple cylinders forming a unit stack. In both bays lie two levels of window groupings having three rectangular sections each; above the top level are square stained-glass windows. A prominent Latin-cross mullion supports square panes in each opening. The basement level repeats this on a smaller scale. The southwest corner of the main block is headed with a small decorative tower with a flat crown.

The dominant feature on the south is the three-sided tower. At basement level a small Latin-cross shaped opening is centered in each side. The round arch opening at the main level repeats the Latin-cross mullion form. Over this is a window grouping of three narrow rectangular sections, each glazed with lattice panes. The top of the tower was to be an observatory, but due to the depressed economy, Seely opted to alter his plan and roughed the tower walls off in keeping with the "ruin" effect of ancient English manor houses.<sup>2</sup> This facade treatment is repeated on all three sides of the tower.

The east wing is composed of three blocks. The first has two groups of the rectangular window clusters on both levels. The corner section is broken by three sets of two narrow rectangular clustered openings. The parapet extends evenly with the wall surface. The third section is one level and has two round arch windows.

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The west wing, added in 1924, is in the shape of a square, with a parapet like that of the east wing. At each outside corner is a rectangular tower having two parallel lattice windows. On both the south and west side is an expansive basket arch window. Within the square mullions are housed square beveled panes. An arched opening is set on the ground level of this wing. A pair of lions, said to be from the City Hall Sherman burned in Atlanta, guard the sides.<sup>3</sup>

Within this arch lies the present main entrance to the house. This rectangular doorway is reached by a simple platform of side steps. Just outside of the wing is the entry to Seely's office. The original door was of twelve hand carved panels depicting Biblical scenes.<sup>4</sup>

The northern or courtyard side of the central block and tower is smaller in scale. The tower contains the original entry in a vestibule protruding from the main structure with a parapet trimmed with a lightish stone; the arched doorway is similarly trimmed. Overhead is a rectangular window with panes of the same shape. The central block lies to the right of the entrance tower. Immediately to the right is a repetition of the three window groupings seen on the southern facade. Next to this is a four section bay, full-height with vertical panels. Latticed panes are supported by rectangular mullions. The parapet of the bay has merlons that are even extensions of the wall surface.

On the courtyard side, the original entrance is guarded by a door made of beams from an ancestral Seely house in Ireland, said to date from the fourteenth century.<sup>5</sup> The earliest section of the house includes the reception hall, Great Room, and present music room on the main level. The reception hall provides mountain vistas from its three-sided bay on the south. The floors and walls are finished with tile, and the room is crowned by an oak cavetto moulding.

The reception hall leads to the Great Room, the largest in the house. The ceiling, thirty-two feet high, is beamed, with each beam fashioned from a complete tree and extending the full width of the room. The walls are paneled with oak to window height and finished in stone. A massive hooded stone fireplace is set in the south wall. Embedded in the fireplace are a stone from the Tower of London, and a piece of the Blarney stone.<sup>6</sup> The stained glass windows are fashioned into crests representing Yale, Princeton, the University of North Carolina, schools which Seely's sons attended, and the state seals of North Carolina, New Jersey, and Tennessee, home states for the family. The group on the west wall are the crests of Great Britain and France along with Wilson's 1917 declaration of war.<sup>7</sup> A bay extending from the northern wall contains a double-sided stairway laid in very small tile.

The lower level beneath the reception hall and great hall includes dining room, kitchen, pantries, laundry room, and wine cellar. A massive stone fireplace acts as the dominate feature of the dining room. An arched fireplace opening is repeated by four round, arched alcoves. A rectangular recess on each side serves as jambs.

On the main level, a music room is connected to the northwest corner of the great hall. The glass door bookcases surrounding the room reveal that it was the original library. The walls were covered in imported paper and the flooring is tile.

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The newer west wing is entered from the music room. A stair from the covered driveway leads up to the narrow entrance gallery, which connects the library with the music room. An interlocking geometric pattern of molded plaster covers the basket arch ceiling of the entrance gallery. The ceiling design of the gallery continues into the spacious library, and there contains the family crests of Seely, More, and Leslie. The library's expansive arched windows, made by the Hope Casement Company of England, have brass fixtures and are on ball rollers that enable them to fold back like a screen.<sup>8</sup> The entire north wall supports walnut shelving with a mezzanine reached by a stationary ladder. On the northwest corner a circular stairway leads to an office below, at the northeast is a small study off the main room. A Tudor mantel, reportedly taken from an English manor that once belonged to Queen Victoria, is set in the southwest corner of the library.

The east wing contains three bedrooms on both levels. The rooms are finished simply with oak flooring and plastered walls that are trimmed with a simple drop band moulding. The oak closet doors have a feature said designed by Thomas A. Edison, who is also said to have wired the house. Each door frame has a mechanism that releases when the door opens and switches on a light. Other lighting fixtures were made by Roycrofters, the same company that designed lighting fixtures at the Grove Park Inn. A solarium, not completed during the Seelys' habitation, concludes the east wing.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Lois Staton interview with Jerry Sternberg, Asheville, N. C., January 9, 1980.

<sup>2</sup>Lois Staton interview with Fred Loring Seely, Jr., Tryon, N. C., January 18, 1980. Hereinafter cited as Seely interview.

<sup>3</sup>Seely interview.

<sup>4</sup>Seely interview.

<sup>5</sup>Seely interview.

<sup>6</sup>Seely interview.

<sup>7</sup>Seely interview.

<sup>8</sup>Seely interview.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<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 type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1914-1924

Builder/Architect

Fred Loring Seely

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Prominently sited above Asheville on Sunset Mountain, Overlook is one of the most ambitious private residences in a city noted for the extravagant boom-period houses of its wealthiest citizens. The castellated stone mansion was built between 1916 and 1924 for Fred Loring Seely (1871-1942), who with his father-in-law Edwin Wiley Grove was a major force in Asheville's early twentieth century transformation into one of the most popular resort cities of the southeast. A man of enormous ambition and personal energy, Seely worked successfully in several parts of the country in a variety of occupations, including chemist, newspaper editor, architect, and businessman. In his best-known achievement, he designed the Grove Park Inn and directed its construction for his father-in-law. As proprietor of the Inn and master of Overlook, Seely hosted some of the leading political and industrial figures of the age, including five presidents and business giants like Edison, Ford and Firestone. After Seely's death Overlook became the campus of Asheville-Biltmore College, the predecessor of the University of North Carolina at Asheville. Today the castle is the home of Overlook Christian Ministries.

### Criteria Assessment:

- A. Associated with Asheville's remarkable early twentieth century growth as one of the nation's leading resort cities.
- B. Associated with the life of Fred Loring Seely, chemist, newspaperman, architect, businessman, and developer, and one of the city's leading figures of the period.
- C. Representative of the extravagance, ambition, pretensions, and personal image of a successful early twentieth century American entrepreneur, here executed in the imported form of an castellated English manor.

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The builder of Asheville's Overlook Castle, Fred Loring Seely, was born in Port Monmouth, New Jersey, in 1871, the son of Uriah and Nancy H. Seely.<sup>1</sup> The Seely family was active in the publishing business. Seely began his diverse working life at the age of thirteen as an office boy in New York. He exhibited ambition and self-motivation at an early age, and began training himself as a chemist while still a teenager, eventually attending the New York College of Pharmacy.

At the age of twenty-four Seely was offered a position as a department head in the pharmaceutical firm of Park, Davis, and Company in Detroit. There he first met Edwin Wiley Grove (1850-1927), a Paris, Tennessee druggist who had "accidentally" invented a process of suspending powdered quinine in fluid, a discovery that led him to a tremendous fortune.<sup>2</sup> Grove requested assistance from the Detroit firm in perfecting a laxative Bromo Quinine tablet, and was referred to Seely. A life-long business and personal relationship ensued.

Grove, who suffered from a bronchial condition, first visited Asheville, N. C., in 1897 when the mountain climate was recommended for his illness. He fell in love with the town, and though he did not settle permanently in Asheville until about 1905, he established a branch laboratory in the city to enable him to keep abreast of his company's experiments during his frequent visits there. Grove hired Seely to direct the Asheville laboratory, and was obviously pleased with the younger man's abilities; within two years Seely had moved on to St. Louis to become a principal executive of the main offices of Grove's Paris Medicine Company. There Seely met and married Grove's daughter Evelyn in 1900, a union that was eventually to produce five children--three boys and two girls. In 1901, the two made a successful trip to Java in search of a new source of quinine for the company. The couple met a Dr. A. S. Van Linge of Holland, an instrumental friend later, on that trip.

In a sudden change of career ambitions, in 1902 Seely moved his family to his home state of New Jersey, there pursuing a liberal arts education at Princeton University. He briefly studied architecture, a preparation crucial to his later work in Asheville. He also met Woodrow Wilson during this period.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile E. W. Grove had been acquiring large amounts of real estate in Atlanta, Georgia, in anticipation of that town's growth as the major metropolis of the south. In 1905 Seely moved to Atlanta at the urging of his father-in-law to establish and edit a newspaper, The Atlanta Georgian; his early family background in publishing also may have prompted him to take this new course. He popularized classified advertising and concerned himself with social causes, taking stands against the convict lease system and for the prohibition of liquor. In 1912 his paper was an important advocate in the south for the candidacy of Woodrow Wilson.

Grove became deeply involved in real estate and development schemes in Asheville, and again at Grove's request, Seely sold the Georgian in 1912 to William Randolph Hearst and returned to Asheville to take charge of his father-in-law's latest project, the

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construction of the Grove Park Inn (NR). Seely was responsible for the design and construction of the rustic structure of native stone, which was touted as "the finest resort hotel in the world." Seely also acted as manager of the inn until 1927.

Seely probably began construction of his personal residence, Overlook, in 1914 after completion of the Grove Park Inn, and presumably employed stonemasons and craftsmen from that project for his ambitious residence. The 29-acre site for the construction of Overlook was given to Seely by his father-in-law. The name was taken from the deer park at the site owned by Grove that served guests of the Grove Park Inn as a picnic ground offering magnificent vistas to the east and west from the top of Sunset Mountain. Visitors at the Grove Park would take a carriage up Toll Road to the park to observe the deer, view silent movies, enjoy picnics, and continue on a day's outing. A one-track tram led up to Overlook Park also.<sup>4</sup>

The Seelys' residence was built and expanded over a period of years, with 1919 being the generally accepted date for completion of the central portion containing the reception hall, great room, and first library. The new library wing and the bedroom wing were completed in 1924.<sup>5</sup>

As manager of the Grove Park Inn and master of Overlook Castle, Seely maintained a prominent social position and enjoyed bipartisan friendships with many of the nation's leading political and industrial leaders. Visitors at the Inn and later at Overlook included such notables as Williams Jennings Bryan, Woodrow Wilson, Calvin Coolidge, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and Harvey Firestone. Warren G. Harding met with his cabinet at Overlook during the Teapot Dome Scandal. Herbert Hoover was a frequent guest in 1939 during his son's lengthy stay in Asheville for health reasons.<sup>6</sup>

Seely's business and community activities continued also. In 1917 he purchased Biltmore Industries (NR) from Mrs. George Vanderbilt, and built a new facility for the craft and homespun weaving operation on a site next to the Grove Park Inn. In 1928 he was instrumental in persuading a Dutch textile firm, Enka, to construct a ten million dollar American Enka plant in Buncombe County; this remains one of the area's most important industries. His friendship with Dr. Van Linge, whom he had met on his Java trip in 1901, was a major factor in this success.

In his later years, Seely took an active interest in the management of the Battery Park Hotel (NR), which E. W. Grove had constructed in downtown Asheville in 1924, and which Mrs. Seely purchased from her father's estate in 1940. He continued to promote and manage Biltmore Industries until his death, and was also active in a number of charitable causes, particularly aid to handicapped and needy children.<sup>7</sup> He died in 1942.

In 1949, Evelyn Seely sold Overlook to Asheville Biltmore College, the predecessor of the University of North Carolina at Asheville, for the sum of \$125,000, of which she donated \$50,000 of the purchase price. The deed specified that "the main residential building, which is known as 'Overlook,' shall be officially designated and referred to as 'Seely Hall' as a memorial to Fred Loring Seely."<sup>8</sup>

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The college moved to a new campus in north Asheville in 1961, and two years later sold the property to William W. Bond, Jr. and Associates of Tennessee,<sup>9</sup> a development firm that erected a high-rise luxury apartment building on a portion of the twenty-nine acre tract. In 1965 the firm sold Overlook and six acres surrounding it to Jerry Sternberg, an Asheville businessman who used the house as his family residence for about ten years.<sup>10</sup> Sternberg offered the house for sale in 1976, but no qualified buyer appeared, and he donated the property to Christian Books Unlimited of Montreat, N. C., as a gift to a charitable organization for tax purposes.<sup>11</sup> In 1976 Christian Books offered Overlook to Nicholas V. and Patricia Cassizzi, a Detroit, Michigan, couple active in evangelistic work, as a facility in which to establish a Christian ministry in Asheville.<sup>12</sup> Cassizzi later reported that while passing through Asheville in 1974 along Tunnel Road he spotted the castle high on Sunset Mountain, and was inspired to claim the structure for Christian works. In 1978 his organization, Overlook Christian Ministries, Inc., took title to the property for the low sum of \$40,000.<sup>13</sup> Though parts of the structure are showing signs of disrepair, Overlook serves today as the Cassizzi family residence and as a meeting hall for Overlook Christian Ministries. The organization is working to stabilize and improve the structure.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Story of Seely's Life is a Story of Success," Asheville Citizen-Times, March 15, 1942. This extensive obituary published at Seely's death was the source for most of the biographical information presented here. Further footnotes will be employed only when information is taken from other sources.

<sup>2</sup>Laurel Shackelford and Bill Weinberg, eds., Our Appalachia (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 163. Hereinafter cited as Shackelford and Weinberg, Our Appalachia.

<sup>3</sup>Shackelford and Weinberg, Our Appalachia, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup>Lois Staton interview with Fred Seely, Jr., Tryon, N. C., January 18, 1980. Hereinafter cited as Seely interview.

<sup>5</sup>Seely interview.

<sup>6</sup>"Former President Held Gratitude for Asheville," Asheville Citizen-Times, October 21, 1964.

<sup>7</sup>"Mrs. Seely Dies in City at Age of 75," Asheville Citizen-Times, January 17, 1953.

<sup>8</sup>Buncombe County Deed Book 680, page 315.

<sup>9</sup>Buncombe County Deed Book 883, page 475.

<sup>10</sup>Lois Staton interview with Jerry Sternberg, Asheville, N. C., January 9, 1980. Hereinafter cited as Sternberg interview.



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<sup>11</sup> Sternberg interview.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Southern interview with Nicholas V. Cassizzi, Asheville, N. C., January, 1979. Hereinafter cited as Cassizzi interview.

<sup>13</sup> Cassizzi interview, and "We Claimed the Castle for the King," Full Gospel Business Men's Voice, Volume 26, Number 10, (January, 1979), p. 16-20.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

The Asheville Citizen, March 15, 1942; January 17, 1953; October 21, 1964.

Buncombe County Records  
Deeds

# 10. Geographical Data

Acres of nominated property 6.02

Quadrangle name Asheville, N. C.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A 

1	7
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3	6	1	0	2	0
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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property includes all of the 6.02 acre tract identified as Lot 85 of Sheet 13, Ward 2, in the Buncombe County Tax Office.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Lois Staton, Consultant, edited by Michael Southern, Survey Specialist, Western Office, Archives and History, Asheville, N. C., 704-298-5024

organization Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section date July 10, 1980

street & number 109 E. Jones Street telephone 919-733-6545

city or town Raleigh, state North Carolina 27611

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title	date
For NCRS use only	<u>8/11/80</u>
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	date
Keeper of the National Register	date
Special Agent in Charge	date

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Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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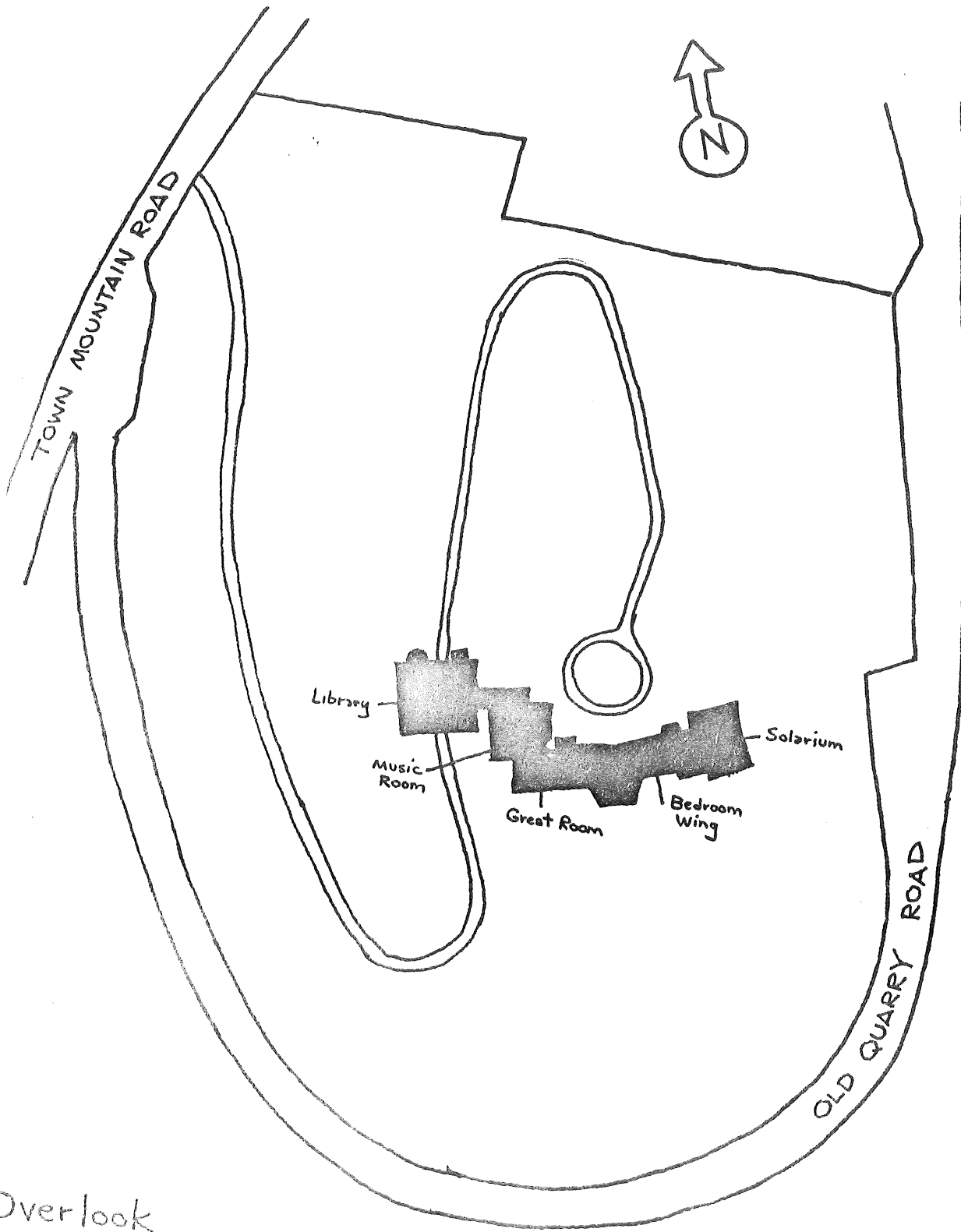
Interviews

Fred Loring Seely, Jr., Tryon, N. C., January 18, 1980.

Jerry Sternberg, Asheville, N. C., January 9, 1980.

Nicholas V. Cassizzi, Asheville, N. C., January, 1979.

Shackelford, Laurel, and Bill Weinberg, eds. Our Appalachia. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.



Overlook  
710 Town Mountain Road  
Asheville, N.C.  
Buncombe County  
July, 1980

Drawn from Buncombe County  
Tax Office map  
Ward 2  
Sheet 13  
Lot 85  
6.02 acres

ASHEVILLE QUADRANGLE  
NORTH CAROLINA-BUNCOMBE CO.  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC) 192-SE  
BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY 4.4 MI

MI. TO JUNCTION U.S. 19, U.S. 23,  
25, & U.S. 70

950 000 FEET

362

363

364

82° 30'

35° 37'

700 000  
FEET  
3943

3942

3941

3940

GREEN U.S. MI.  
BLACK INTN. 11 MI.

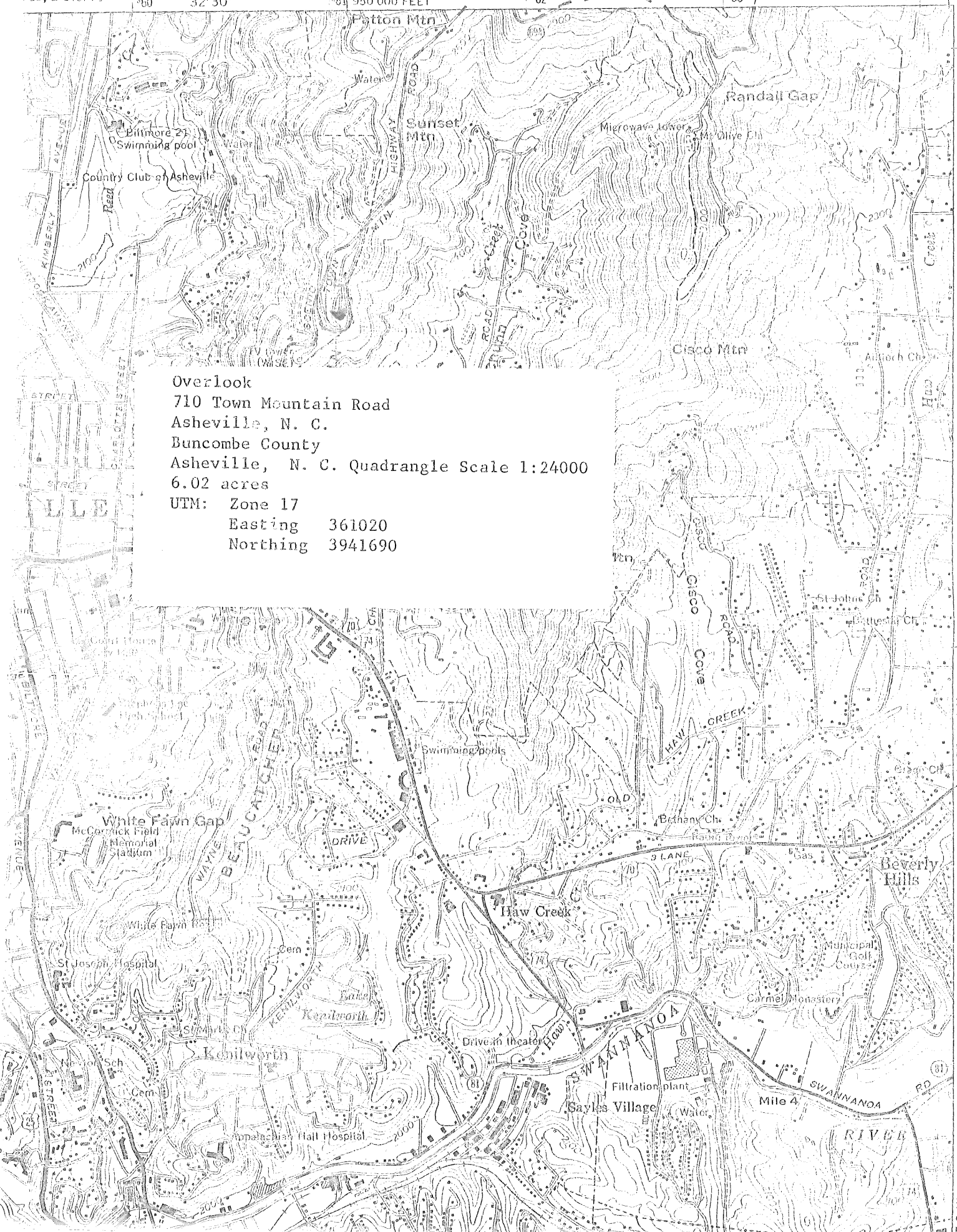
3939

35'

3938

7.5 MI.  
1.5 MI.

Overlook  
710 Town Mountain Road  
Asheville, N. C.  
Buncombe County  
Asheville, N. C. Quadrangle Scale 1:24000  
6.02 acres  
UTM: Zone 17  
Easting 361020  
Northing 3941690



ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

NORTH CAROLINA

STATE

Date Entered      OCT 22 1980

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
✓ Duke-Lawrence House	Rich Square vicinity Northampton County
✓ Fire Station No. 2	Charlotte Mecklenburg County
✓ Carr, John Price, House	Charlotte Mecklenburg County
✓ Overlook	Asheville Buncombe County

Also Notified

Honorable Jesse Helms  
Honorable Robert B. Morgan  
Honorable L. H. Fountain  
Honorable James G. Martin  
Honorable Lamar Gudger

For further information, please call the National Register at (202)343-6401.

L 111

10/22/80

