

=====

7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/ TUDOR REVIVAL

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

roof ASPHALT

walls BRICK

other METAL/steel

STONE/limestone

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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8. Statement of Significance

=====

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- _____ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- _____ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- _____ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- _____ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- _____ B removed from its original location.
- _____ C a birthplace or a grave.
- _____ D a cemetery.
- _____ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- _____ F a commemorative property.
- _____ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form
The Iowa Beta Chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon
Story County, Iowa

(Page 4)

Period of Significance 1931

Significant Dates 1931

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation _____

Architect/Builder EMERY, AMOS B.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

___ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
___ previously listed in the National Register
___ previously determined eligible by the National Register
___ designated a National Historic Landmark
___ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
___ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
☒ Local government
☒ University
☒ Other

Name of repository:

=====

10. Geographical Data

=====

Acreage of Property LESS THAN ONE ACRE

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

| | Zone | Easting | Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------|------|---------|----------|
| 1 | <u>15</u> | <u>446904</u> | <u>4652250</u> | 3 | _____ | _____ |
| 2 | ___ | ___ | ___ | 4 | ___ | ___ |
| ___ See continuation sheet. | | | | | | |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 7

IOWA BETA CHAPTER OF SIGMA PHI EPSILON
name of property
STORY COUNTY, IOWA
county and State

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

Completed in 1931, the Iowa Beta Chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity House is National Register eligible locally under Criterion C; the building's design is a classic example of Tudor Revival style. As discussed in "Works of a Master" on Section 8, page 10 of this nomination, this was Amos B. Emery's one and only Tudor Revival style building and one of only two fraternities designed by Mr. Emery. This house was the only fraternity he designed at Iowa State University. As a "Master Architect" and a "Pioneer of Modernism", Mr. Emery balanced the simplicity of a cottage with modern detailing that does not dominate the appearance, but instead offers interesting elements that did not add extensive cost during the time of the Great Depression.

ARCHITECTURE

The Iowa Beta Chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon house is significant, under National Register Criterion C. The building's design is an excellent example of the Tudor Revival Style interpreted in a contemporary way by a Master Architect. Tudor Revival was a dominant style of domestic buildings used for a large proportion of early 20th century suburban houses throughout the country. It was particularly fashionable during the late 1920's and early 1930's according to A Field Guide to American Houses, written by Virginia and Lee McAlester.

The Sigma Phi Epsilon house incorporates a number of features typically seen in Tudor Revival Style, such as the front façade dominated by two steeply pitched cross gables, decorative half-timbering in the gable areas, a steeply pitched main roof with gabled ends, tall and narrow casement windows in multiple groups with multi-pane glazing, brick wall cladding with stucco gable areas and a stepped entry with a simple arched header of brick. Also noticeable on this house as typically seen on Tudor Revival buildings are the varied eave-line heights. The angled portion of the Sigma Phi Epsilon house is lower than the main edifice and the cross gables also vary in height. Small, steeply pitched dormers are placed on each side of the main roof.

The building has a single round chimney near the front entry and a massive chimney crowned with two decorative chimney stacks. The pots on top of these round chimneys are white limestone and they are stepped inward as the pots grow taller. The round chimney stacks themselves include decorative brick banding that diagonally wrap each chimney as it spirals upward to the chimney pot. Refer to photos #6 and #7 at the end of this nomination.

One of the most noticeable Tudor Revival details of this house is the romantic oriel on the front façade at the north cross gable. This oriel has a semi-hexagonal bay appearance and is supported visually underneath with a tapered wood enclosure. The oriel has a slightly hipped roof on top and provides a beautiful end to this cross-gable. Refer to photo #8 at the end of this nomination.

Brickwork on this house includes American Bond brick patterning with soldier courses as lintels for the building's fenestration, rowlock sill courses and a single, continuous soldier band of brick near the grade level. The Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity crest made of white limestone is embedded into the brick masonry at the main entry cross gable. Refer to photo #9 at the end of this nomination.

Inside the house, the timbered Tudor Revival appearance continues, particularly in the large lounge room and the balcony. Heavy-timber trusses at the lounge are chamfered on the edges and half-timbering is used at the transition to the balcony. The lounge ceiling follows the angle of the roof to vault the room and includes panels that are separated by a similar half-timbering board effect. Dark wall paneling at the receiving hall and wood flooring in the public areas reinforce the style of the building. Refer to photos #11, #12 and #13 at the end of this nomination.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 8

IOWA BETA CHAPTER OF SIGMA PHI EPSILON
name of property
STORY COUNTY, IOWA
county and State

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The interesting quality of the building's design did not go un-noticed upon construction. The variety of roof heights, window configurations and sizes, the complex roof and varied use of building materials created an interesting and picturesque appearance. Many Greek residences at Iowa State College were influenced by Georgian Revival, Classical Revival and Tudor Revival. The use of contemporary details within the body of a European style created unique designs among Greek housing in the neighborhood around Sigma Phi Epsilon. The student yearbook at Iowa State College reported:

The new Sigma Phi Epsilon house is of brick with steel framework. The roof is of grey slate shingles. Other points of particular interest outside are the Sig Ep crest of white stone placed in the front gable, the small steel balcony, the round chimneys, and the front porch with its odd railing and stone floor. (The Alumnus, November, 1930)

Many Greeks at Iowa State chose medieval inspired or historic styles during the 1920s. New Greek housing slowed during the Great Depression, with a few exceptions. The article mentioned above from The Alumnus is entitled "Three Fraternities in New Homes", and included the Sigma Phi Epsilon house, the Theta Xi house and the Delta Upsilon house. Regarding these other two houses, The Alumnus states:

The Theta Xi house ... Is of American design with a sprinkling of Old English architecture...the nearly completed Delta Upsilon chapter house just off Lincoln Way on Ash Avenue. The general style of architecture is Old French Norman..." (The Alumnus, November, 1930)

European architecture certainly had its influence on Greek living at Iowa State University (ISU). Other examples of Tudor Revival architectural style in Greek living at ISU include Phi Kappa Theta (2110 Lincoln Way), Pi Kappa Alpha (2112 Lincoln Way), Theta Xi (315 Welch Avenue), Triangle (125 North Hyland Avenue) and Alpha Tau Omega (2122 Lincoln Way). In 2007, the Sigma Sigma- Delta Chi fraternity house (now known as the Iowa House Historic Inn at 405 Hayward Avenue) was submitted and accepted on the National Register of Historic Places. While some of these Tudor Revival examples such as Pi Kappa Alpha, Theta Xi, Delta Upsilon and Triangle houses (see figure 20 on continuation sheet 35) represent imposing "strict Old English" brick and stone structures (like sprawling English Manor houses), other smaller scale examples such as the Iowa House Historic Inn, Alpha Tau Omega and the Phi Kappa Theta House (see figure 21 on continuation sheet 36) contain an eclectic mix of Tudor Revival, Romanesque and even Craftsman style architectural features. The difference in façade length, complexity and massing is substantial and clearly evident when viewing these two groups of Tudor Revival examples.

Whether by choice of the architect or by restrictions imposed by the given site or both, the difference in length, complexity and massing at Sigma Phi Epsilon as compared to the other examples is significant. The Sigma Phi Epsilon house is neither a smaller, eclectically-styled house nor is it a long, highly-decorative and massive house. The architect, Amos B. Emery, may have designed the Sigma Phi Epsilon house with a break in the main edifice of the house (stepped roof and angle change) in order to follow the curve of Gray Avenue or he may have intended this change in massing so as to create a Tudor Revival style house that does not strictly follow the larger "Old English type" like so many others. Either way, he did create a uniquely fresh, mid-scale Tudor Revival style Greek house.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 9

IOWA BETA CHAPTER OF SIGMA PHI EPSILON
name of property
STORY COUNTY, IOWA
county and State

Other Notable Features

The Sigma Phi Epsilon house includes characteristics not found on other Tudor Revival Greek houses at Iowa State University (ISU), such as the round chimneys with decorative brick banding, segmented arch entry (not protruding), interior timber and half-timber elements in the lounge, a mostly symmetrical west façade with aligned fenestration, and a vertically oriented oriel bay-window positioned at the gable end. The house contains simple detailing and vertical alignment of similar-sized windows on the front (west) and north facades. Mr. Emery seemed to play with the Tudor Revival style elements, sometimes departing from a strict interpretation of the style in order to invent new uses for these elements. For example, other Tudor Revival Greek houses at ISU consist of a plane of half-timbering and plaster at the upper portion of the façade overhanging the brick or stone below. On these houses, wood corbels can be found below this half-timbering plane to visually support the upper portion of the facade. Contrastingly, all half-timbering at the Sigma Phi Epsilon house is flush with the brick below, thus devoid of an overhang and the necessity for corbels. Mr. Emery approached the design of the Sigma Phi Epsilon house with a simplified, fresh perspective on the use of the Tudor Revival elements within the overall context of the style. His rendering shown in figure 9 on continuation sheet 24 illustrates a building of reduced scale with the overall appearance of a story-book cottage. One obvious change during construction or late in design is the use of brick on the angled lounge/dining portion of the house in lieu of the extensive half-timbering shown in the rendering. The result is a building with a small amount of half-timbering and a larger amount of non-detailed brick.

ARCHITECT AMOS B. EMERY

The Sigma Phi Epsilon house was a significant project for architect Amos B. Emery while he was located in an office at the Observatory Tower in Des Moines in the late 1920s. Mr. Emery worked in a variety of firms in a variety of roles before and after designing this house. According to *Iowa's Historic Architects* written by Wesley I. Shank, Mr. Emery attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts studios, associated with the Atelier Gromort. As a pilot and second lieutenant in the army, he was one of fifty American architects who seized this opportunity, part of a number of educational programs developed for U.S. troops idle after the Armistice of November 1918 and waiting for transportation home. In 1913 before his commission with the army, Mr. Emery worked for architects Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson. In 1922 after his military service, Mr. Emery received a Bachelor of Architecture degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Just after receiving this degree, he worked for George R. Post & Sons in New York City as a draftsman from 1922 to 1923. He returned to Des Moines and worked once again for Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson in 1923 as a designer and chief draftsman. Just prior to leaving Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson, Mr. Emery designed the tower for the University of Iowa Hospital. The Gothic design of this tower was no doubt influenced by his time in France. Receiving his architectural registration in 1927 by exemption, he went into private practice with John Normile forming the firm of Normile & Emery. Mr. Emery and Mr. Normile dissolved their firm in 1930, at which time it appears that Mr. Emery designed the Sigma Phi Epsilon house at ISU. In 1932, Mr. Emery went to work in Washington, D.C. as the Senior Refuge Planner, U.S. Biological Service and Senior Inspector, National Park Service. Mr. Emery was in charge of more than two hundred architects designing structures for national parks and conservation areas. Many of these structures were built during the Depression by Civilian Conservation Corps. Returning to Des Moines in 1938, Mr. Emery formed a partnership with H. Clark Souers. Souers had been a partner in the firm Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson. Souers & Emery lasted four years before Mr. Emery took a job as supervising architect with Howard R. Green Co. from 1942 to 1945. After World War II, Mr. Emery worked as construction architect for the Des Moines Register and Tribune from 1945 to 1949. The later part of Mr. Emery's career continued to see partnerships formed with a variety of individuals, including Sewell Mathre in the 1950's, Carl Hunter in the early 1960's, and Clifford Prall in the later 1960's. Mr. Emery designed numerous single family houses during the early 1950's and into the 1960's. He continued to work on a variety of building types as well. He served twice as the President of the Iowa AIA chapter and he even had a short stint as an architecture professor at Iowa State University. At the conclusion of his career, Mr. Emery worked as a construction inspector at Brooks Borg Skiles in Des Moines. Ironically, this same firm is where his career began before World War I, as Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson changed their name to Brooks Borg Skiles in the 1930's.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 10

IOWA BETA CHAPTER OF SIGMA PHI EPSILON
name of property
STORY COUNTY, IOWA
county and State

WORKS OF A MASTER

Because he worked three different times for the firm of Brooks Borg Skiles (formerly known as Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson), Mr. Emery's remaining original drawings from his entire career are housed in the office of Brooks Borg and Skiles (BBS). I have had the privilege of looking through the compilation of Mr. Emery's work, with the kind assistance of BBS partner and architect, Mr. Steve Stimmel, AIA. I must agree with Mr. John W. Brooks, who was a former college roommate and co-worker of Mr. Emery, that Mr. Emery was a brilliant designer and had a great talent. Mr. Emery had an impressive drawing ability, particularly related to architectural perspective drawings/techniques and his design work crossed a wide variety of styles, mostly influenced by current trends at the time of each design. Most of the drawings currently housed at BBS are from the 1950's through the 1960's. Most of the projects are single family houses and the styles vary greatly.

Based on the construction date of 1931 for the Sigma Phi Epsilon house, Mr. Emery would have likely designed this house immediately after his partnership with John Normile and while serving as President of the Iowa Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1930. The title on the original drawings for the house state "Amos B. Emery, Architect" with no association to a particular firm. During the same time that the Sigma Phi Epsilon house was designed, Mr. Emery was also designing the Sigma Kappa Sorority house in Ames immediately across the street from the Sigma Phi Epsilon house. The Sigma Kappa house demonstrates Mr. Emery's ability to design a variety of building styles. Like the Sigma Phi Epsilon house, it was completed in 1931. However, the Sigma Kappa house is a French Norman style building (inspired by French chateaux in Normandy -see continuation sheet 33 for photos of this house). While Mr. Emery did design some smaller interior remodeling projects for fraternities and sororities at the campus of Drake University in Des Moines, he designed only one other known Greek student house. Not surprisingly, that house was for the Iowa Delta Chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon at Drake University in Des Moines. It seems that individuals at the Iowa Delta Chapter (Drake campus) may have been impressed with the design of the Iowa Beta Chapter (ISU campus chapter) house, thus hiring Mr. Emery to design their house sometime in the 1960's. The Sigma Phi Epsilon house at Drake is a mix of Georgian and Colonial Revival architectural styles (see continuation sheet 34 for a photo of this house) and includes 5 bay spacings of windows, modillions and dentil molding details.

There is little doubt that the time Mr. Emery spent in Europe and his time with other European-influenced architects at Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson in his early years influenced his designs in the 1920's and 1930's. His designs present a look at the past, but not in the strictest sense of any particular style. ISU Professor Emeritus Wesley I. Shank stated "the first thought that comes to my mind is that Mr. Emery was a Pioneer of Modernism." *

The preserved drawings at Brooks Borg Skiles reveal that Mr. Emery was not focused on creating or even strictly enforcing any particular architectural style, but instead he explored modern ways of adjusting the style chosen for the particular project he was designing at the time. The Sigma Phi Epsilon house is one such example of this. Thanks to Mr. Emery's fresh approach to the Tudor Revival style, this house stands unique among the context of the neighboring fraternities and sororities at ISU. This was Mr. Emery's one and only Tudor Revival style building and the only fraternity he designed at ISU with the only other at the Drake University campus in Des Moines.

* Shank, Wesley L. oral history with Blum, Scott T. (Spring 2010)

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form
The Iowa Beta Chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon
Story County, Iowa

NPS Form 10-900-a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 11

IOWA BETA CHAPTER OF SIGMA PHI EPSILON
name of property
STORY COUNTY, IOWA
county and State

SOCIAL HISTORY

The Iowa Beta chapter was formally chartered from the Sigma Phi Epsilon National fraternity on April 20, 1916, making it the fortieth local chapter of the fraternity which today has over three hundred. Soon afterwards, Sigma Phi Epsilon established its first house in Ames, Iowa, which was located at 407 Welch Avenue (in the present location of Pi Kappa Phi fraternity).

The number of Sigma Phi Epsilon members on campus was fairly small for the first few years of existence. Usually, there were not more than 15-20 active members until later years. In 1931, the house that is occupied today by Sigma Phi Epsilon was completed. Then came the Great Depression of the 30's. The Sigma Phi Epsilon house, as well as other houses on campus, began to go into debt. At the outset of the Depression, the Iowa Beta Alumni Board owned almost a whole block of "nicotine woods" around the house. To keep the banks from closing down Iowa Beta because they lacked sufficient funds, the Alumni Board had to give almost all of its land to the bank. There was not enough money for fuel oil bills for the first few winters of the Great Depression, so the men lived in the living room only. Of all the pledge duties during this period, the most important was to acquire wood for the fireplace. New members are still asked to get the firewood to remember this event.

In the fall of 1932, Sigma Phi Epsilon was only 20 members strong. Funds were low at this time. But just as the building weathered the storm, so too did its residents. The next few years brought hope for Sigma Phi Epsilon. In 1935, the house was nearly full with 30 men living in the house (at that time consisted of only two-man study rooms). The men of Iowa Beta started becoming more and more involved on campus. The house size continued to increase until World War II when there were about 75-80 men.

On May 23, 1943, the Saturday night before finals week, a costly fire broke out. The fire damaged the third floor extensively and burned through the ceiling of the second floor. Repairs were made over the summer, but another crisis arose. During the fall of 1942, two-thirds of the men of Sigma Phi Epsilon left for World War II. There were not enough members left to keep the house going. To solve the problem, the Alumni Board made rental agreements with the college to provide housing for women. During the war, there were more women enrolled at Iowa State than it had room for. Women resided at the Sigma Phi Epsilon house until the end of World War II.

After the war, Iowa State University's enrollment reached a record high and Sigma Phi Epsilon quickly grew in size to about 100 men. Many members had to live in apartments. Arguments were constant over who was going to get to live in the fraternity house.

During the summer of 1952, Sigma Phi Epsilon added on to its kitchen and expanded the house mother's quarters. Between the years of 1957 and 1962 Sigma Phi Epsilon was very strong internally and externally. The house size grew to about 120 men and the Sigma Phi Epsilon members lead many campus activities. During that time, Mr. Robert L. Bartley was a Sigma Phi Epsilon at ISU. Mr. Bartley graduated with a degree in journalism from Iowa State University in 1959. Having lived four years in the Sigma Phi Epsilon Fraternity House in Ames, Mr. Bartley went on to become an influential and controversial journalist in American history after his graduation at ISU. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom award (the highest civilian honor), the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing, the Gerald Loeb Award and a Citation for Excellence from the Overseas Press Club of America. He was an author and most notably, the famed Editor in Chief of the Wall Street Journal for many years. His high-achievement after leaving ISU and the Iowa Beta Chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon is a legacy for which all members can be proud of.

Hundreds of men and even a few women (during WWII) can recognize the house at 228 Gray Avenue as their house and many were influenced by this experience for their entire lives.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 12

IOWA BETA CHAPTER OF SIGMA PHI EPSILON
name of property
STORY COUNTY, IOWA
county and State

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A series of fires destroyed many of Iowa State's dormitories and decreased on-campus student housing at Iowa State College during the late 19th century. In the early 1900's, most Greek houses at Iowa State were located in the West Gate area, which is just to the west side of the ISU campus along Sheldon Avenue. This location was convenient for walking to class. There were even some Greek houses located in downtown Ames, far from campus. At this same time, residential neighborhoods developed near the Campustown area along the south edge of ISU. Campustown consisted primarily of two main thoroughfares: Lincoln Way running east-west and Welch Avenue running north-south. With the opening of a new bridge over College Creek at Welch Avenue, newly organized Greek houses had easy access from Campustown and increased the attraction to Greek houses on the South side of campus.

West Ames boomed in population and construction between 1910 and 1920. Student enrollment shot up to nearly 3,600 students. Between 1920 and 1930, the student population increased to over 4,300. This all placed pressure on the current dormitory system. Construction of Hughes Hall (first phase of Friley Hall) by ISU in 1927 was a response by the University to the housing shortage. Friley Hall was one of the largest residence halls in the nation. With the increasing popularity of Campustown due in part to the commercial building construction along Lincoln Way by A.L. Champlin, the south side of ISU's campus was the place of choice for business enterprise and off-campus student living. In addition to the Campustown commercial area, ISU's choice to construct the new Alumni Hall close to Lincoln Way enhanced the student's social activities along Lincoln Way. The Alumni Hall building was completed in 1907.

Although World War I slowed the growth of Greek housing construction, it picked up again in earnest just after the war in 1918. As student enrollments increased, so did Greek living popularity. Having received their Iowa Beta Charter in 1916, Sigma Phi Epsilon established their house on Welch Avenue and as the house population continued to increase, the Alumni Board purchased property nearby. This proved to be a wise move as they were ready, despite the tough economic times, to construct their new house in 1931 at 228 Gray Avenue.

REPRESENTATION IN OTHER CULTURAL RESOURCES SURVEYS AND METHODOLOGY

Recently, the City of Ames has declared this neighborhood to be a Design Overlay Zoning District in order to preserve the original integrity of buildings in the district. Recently, William C. Page, a historian and consultant retained by the City of Ames, indicated this neighborhood as "high probability" in becoming listed on the National Register of Historic Places. No other known cultural resource survey has been performed.

POTENTIAL FOR ARCHAEOLOGY

The site's potential for archaeological significance is unevaluated as of yet. As a part of a wooded area, the site remained uninhabited during the historical era prior to 1931. The site potential for pre-historic significance remains unassessed.