

ST. ELIZABETHS HOSPITAL, COMFORT STATION
(Building No. 77)
2700 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, Southeast, Pine Street,
Southeast
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS DC-349-AW
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ST. ELIZABETHS HOSPITAL, COMFORT STATION (BUILDING 77)

HABS NO. DC-349-AW

Location: Pine Street SE, Washington, D.C., on the West Campus of St. Elizabeths Hospital

Present Owner: General Services Administration, United States Government

Present Use: Vacant (rehabilitation of St. Elizabeths West Campus in progress)

Significance: The Comfort Station (Building 77) is significant as a context structure that contributes to the broader historic character of the St. Elizabeths West Campus. The individual significance of the Comfort Station is as a support structure to the adjacent Gatehouse No. 2 (Building 78). The building was originally used as a restroom for campus staff. The Comfort Station is a vernacular structure with ornamental architecture features including roof cresting and exposed rafters.

Historians: Mike Ford, Kenneth Itle, Tim Penich, and Deborah Slaton, Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1922¹
2. Architect: Not known
3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, uses: St. Elizabeths Hospital (then the Government Hospital for the Insane) was placed under the control of the Department of the Interior by an act of Congress on March 3, 1855. Thus when the Comfort Station was constructed in 1922, the hospital was under the control of the Department of the Interior and remained so until 1940, when St. Elizabeths was transferred to the Federal Security Agency. The Federal Security Agency was a new government agency that oversaw federal activities in the fields of health, education, and social insurance. In 1953, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare was created. At that time several of the functions of the Federal Security Agency, including control of St. Elizabeths Hospital, were transferred to the new department.² In 1968, St. Elizabeths was transferred to the National Institute of Mental Health, an agency within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The Institute wanted to demonstrate how a large mental hospital could be converted into a smaller, more modern facility for training, service, and research.³ In 1979, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare became the Department of Health and Human Services with the creation of the Department of Education. The Department of Health and Human Services retained

¹ *Investigation of St. Elizabeths Hospital*. The Sixty-ninth Congress, second edition. House of Representatives. Letter from the Comptroller General of the United States, July 1, 1926.

² *Federal Register*, accessed at <http://www.federalregister.gov/agencies/saint-elizabeth-s-hospital>, January 5, 2012.

³ 1970 *Annual Report*.

control of the hospital until 2004 when the west campus of St. Elizabeths was transferred to the General Services Administration.

From its original construction in 1922 until circa 1970s, the Comfort Station was in use to support staff and visitors to Gatehouse No. 2. By 1980, the gatehouse had been vacated and mothballed; the adjacent comfort station was likely also vacated at the same time.⁴ In 2012, renovation of the building began, as part of the rehabilitation of the St. Elizabeths West Campus.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not known
5. Original plans and construction: In 1900, a south entrance was constructed at the St. Elizabeths west campus. The entrance was located to the east of the eventual location of the Administration Building (A Building, Building 74).⁵ A small wood-framed building, likely serving as a gatehouse, was situated next to the entrance.⁶ In 1905, Superintendent William White requested an \$8,600 appropriation for the construction of a new gatehouse to place at the south entrance.⁷ Using an \$8,000 appropriation that was granted for this work, a new south entrance was established with the construction of a brick paved road in 1914. The entrance was located approximately 200 yards north of the existing south entrance. No gatehouse was constructed at this time.⁸ To the south of the entrance and just inside the property walls was a vertical board-and-batten structure with a wood-shingle gable roof. The exact date of the construction of the wood-framed structure is unknown.⁹

In 1922, the Comfort Station was constructed as a rectilinear brick structure, replacing an earlier building on this site. The utilitarian outbuilding had a concrete foundation, corbelled brick dentil, and wood-framed door and window openings. A wood-framed asbestos tile hip roof was capped by a decorative wood scrolled ornament, similar to that on the Fan House (Building 71).¹⁰ Two other comfort stations of similar construction were built at the same time. The three comfort stations cost a total of \$4,532.¹¹ In 1926, the adjacent Gatehouse No. 2 was constructed.¹²

⁴ Office of the Superintendent, *Master Facilities Use Plan, revised 1980* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1980).

⁵ 1899–1900 *Annual Report*, 6.

⁶ Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., “South east from near the water tower to the new entrance,” December 26, 1900, Olmsted Archives, photograph no. 2825-6, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Brookline, Massachusetts.

⁷ 1905 *Annual Report*, 781.

⁸ 1913–1914 *Annual Report*, 588. 1914 *Annual Report*.

⁹ *Historic Resources Management Plan*, Devroux & Purnell Architects-Planners, PC, with Betty Bird, Historian, and Rhodeside & Harwell Inc., Landscape Architects, prepared for the D.C. Office of Business and Economic Development and the Office of the Assistant City Administrator for Economic Development, Washington, D.C., September 1993, 80; undated archival photograph estimated to be circa 1914.

¹⁰ 1922–1923 *Annual Report*, 3; findings of the *Historic Resources Management Plan* and the shared architectural aesthetic with the Fan House suggest that the Comfort Station adjacent to Gatehouse No. 2 was constructed in 1905. However, based on the 1922–1923 *Annual Report* and *Cultural Landscape Report*, IV.20, it is evident that the Comfort Station was in fact constructed in 1922. The description is based on existing physical evidence.

¹¹ *Investigation of St. Elizabeths Hospital*. The Sixty-ninth Congress, second edition. House of Representatives. Letter from the Comptroller General of the United States, July 1, 1926.

¹² *Historic Resources Management Plan*, 80.

6. Alterations and additions: No documentation is available of any changes to the comfort station after its initial construction. Based on physical evidence, few if any substantive alterations were made. The structure was stabilized and mothballed prior to 2002.¹³

B. Historical context¹⁴

Throughout the tenure of Superintendent William White (1903–1906), St. Elizabeths Hospital continued to grow as a clinical institution, patient hospital, and research facility. The last building campaign on the west campus spanned from the 1910s through the 1920s and included the development of a series of staff facilities, support buildings, and campus improvements to the west campus. New single-family staff residences (Buildings 15, 17, 27, 67, 76) and the Employee Cafeteria (Building 70) were constructed to address the success of the hospital as a clinical institution. Support buildings, such as the Storage Shed (Building 11) and Mechanical and Electrical Shop (Building 12), were constructed along the perimeter of west campus development. The Red Cross Building (no longer extant), the General Store/ Canteen, and a collection of small comfort stations (including Building 77) were constructed to improve security and patient conditions.¹⁵

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Comfort Station is a one-story square brick masonry building set on a concrete slab foundation. Small window openings are covered with wood louvers. The hip roof is covered with cement asbestos shingles and has sheet metal cresting along the ridge, as well as exposed wood eaves and rafters. Character-defining features of the simple vernacular style building include its brick masonry, with a simple decorative band at the top of the wall defined by projecting rowlock bricks, as well as wood eaves with exposed rafters, hip roof with sheet metal cresting along the ridge, and wood-framed door and window openings.
2. Condition of fabric: At the time of the field survey for the Historic Structure Reports/Building Preservation Plans project in 2009, the Comfort Station was in fair to poor condition overall. The brick walls exhibited organic growth at their base and efflorescence across the wall surfaces. Some roof shingles were removed and patched with sheet metal or self-adhering membrane, and the roof surface was covered with moss and organic growth. The interior exhibited paint failure and mildew on most surfaces. The doors and windows exhibited paint failure and some wood deterioration.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 15'-6" by 13'-3" rectangular building, 14'-6" to the peak of the roof.
2. Foundations: The foundation is a concrete slab on grade.

¹³ Comparison of 1945 and 2002 archival photographs.

¹⁴ A context history for the entire St. Elizabeths West Campus, as well as an overview history of the Service and Support Building (Entrances) Group, is to be developed under separate cover as part of this HABS documentation project.

¹⁵ Gatehouse No. 2 was constructed in its current form in 1926. References made in annual reports and archival photographs indicate a watch guard station as early as 1900.

3. Walls: The building has load-bearing brick walls that are laid in a common bond pattern with a header row every sixth course. The simple cornice consists of a course of rowlock headers with alternating bricks projecting from the wall plane. The north and south facades each have a pair of windows with rowlock sills and exposed steel lintels. There is a single door opening on each of the east and west facades with similar steel lintels.
4. Structural system, framing: The structure has exterior load-bearing brick walls set on a concrete foundation and a wood-framed hip roof. The brick walls are 9 inches thick and have window and door penetrations framed with steel lintels. The roof is framed with 2-inch by 4-inch rafters spaced at 24 inches on center supporting 1-inch-thick plank decking.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, porticoes, bulkheads: None present.
6. Chimneys: None present.
7. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: Each of the two restrooms is accessed from an exterior door. The exterior door opening has a painted wood frame. The door itself is approximately 16 inches shorter than the masonry opening, and the area above is filled with a painted wood blank panel. The original five-panel wood doors have been removed from the hinges but are stored within the building.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Each window opening originally had one three-light top-hinged inward-swinging wood sash; the sash have been removed and are stored in the building. The window openings are covered by painted wood louvers on the exterior.
8. Roof
 - a. Shape, covering: The building has a hip roof covered with cement asbestos shingles laid in a diamond pattern, with rounded shingles at the ridges and a decorative wood double volute crest at the ridge.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: The roof has projecting eaves and exposed 2-inch by 4-inch rafters. There are no gutters or downspouts.
 - c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None present.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The comfort station is close to square in plan, with two equally-sized toilet rooms created by a wood-framed partition running north-south at the center of the building.
2. Stairways: None present.
3. Flooring: The interior floors are concrete.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The toilet room walls are finished with plaster. The wood roof framing and sheathing is exposed to the interior, as is the ceiling.

5. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: There are no interior doorways.
 - b. Windows: The windows have molded painted wood sills, aprons, and surrounds.
6. Decorative features and trim: None present.
7. Hardware: The original wood five-panel doors have keyed deadbolts. Other hardware is missing.
8. Mechanical Equipment
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The Comfort Station was apparently served by the centralized coal-fired steam heating system from the Power House (Building 56/57). One two-pipe hot water radiator is present in each restroom. Exposed iron piping serving these radiators enters through the floor; the location of the boiler that served this piping is not known. Natural ventilation was provided through operable windows.
 - b. Lighting: Interior lighting is provided by one painted metal fixture in each restroom with a single lamp; the bases are designed to hold glass globes, but no globes are present. The electricity is supplied by exposed metal conduit.
 - c. Plumbing: Each restroom has a radiator, sink, and toilet. The men's restroom contains a urinal and toilet. All of the water supply and waste piping is iron.

D. Site:

1. Historic landscape design: Documentation of the landscape of the west campus of St. Elizabeths Hospital can be found in Historic American Landscape Survey documentation submittal DC-11.

The Comfort Station is location directly behind Gatehouse No. 2 and is integral to the overall complex of the south gate. Concrete sidewalks connect this building with Gatehouse No. 2.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: None available.
- B. Early Views: None available.
- C. Interviews: No oral history interviews were performed for this documentation project.
- D. Selected Sources:

Annual Reports of the Board of Visitors and the Superintendent of Construction. Government Hospital for the Insane, 1861–1867, 1869, 1872, and 1875.

Building Preservation Plan: Comfort Station (Building 77), St. Elizabeths West Campus, Washington, D.C. Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. Prepared for the General Services Administration, March 12, 2010.

- Centennial Papers: St. Elizabeths Hospital, 1855–1955.* Winfred Overholser, ed. Washington, D.C.: Centennial Commission, St. Elizabeths Hospital, 1956.
- Condition & Reuse Assessment: St. Elizabeths West Campus (draft).* Oehrlein & Associates Architects. Prepared for the General Services Administration, January 4, 2006.
- Correspondence and Promotional Literature Relating Primarily to the Selection of Hospital Sites by the Federal Board of Hospitalization. 1928–1943.* Records of St. Elizabeths Hospital, Record Group 418, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.
- Correspondence and Other Records Relating to Administrative Matters, 1909–1929.* Records of the Office of the Superintendent, (1855–1967). Records of St. Elizabeths Hospital, Record Group 418, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.
- D'Amore, Arcangelo R. T., ed. *William Alanson White: The Washington Years.* Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976.
- The DHS Headquarters Consolidation at St. Elizabeths: Final Master Plan.* Oehrlein & Associates Architects and Robinson & Associates. Inc. Prepared for the General Services Administration. November 10, 2008.
- General Correspondence and Other Records of the Federal Board of St. Elizabeths Hospital.* Records of the Office of the Superintendent, (1855–1967), Record Group 418.
- Historic Preservation Report: St. Elizabeths West Campus,* John Milner Architects. Prepared for the General Services Administration. December 7, 2005.
- Letters Sent, "Executive Series" 1857–1906.* Records of St. Elizabeths Hospital, Record Group 418.
- Library of Congress. Washington, D.C.: Geography & Maps Reading Room. Collection contains various topographical maps for the District of Columbia and St. Elizabeths campus from 1855–1985.
- Maps and Plans of the Government Hospital for the Insane (St. Elizabeths Hospital), 05/27/1839–12/14/1938.* Department of the Interior, St. Elizabeths Hospital (1916–06/30/1940). Records of St. Elizabeths Hospital, 1820–1981. Record Group 418, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.
- National Archives and Record Administration. Textual Documents Division. Washington, D.C. Record Group 418, Records of St. Elizabeths Hospital. Entry 20, Records of the Superintendent, Annual Report of the Subordinate Units, 1919–1966.
- National Archives and Record Administration. Textual Documents Division. Washington, D.C. Record Group 42, Records of St. Elizabeths Hospital, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Cartographic and Architectural Drawings Division, College Park, Maryland. Record Group 418, Records of St. Elizabeths Hospital, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Cartographic and Architectural Drawings Division, College Park, Maryland. Record Group 48, Records of the Secretary of the Interior.

Photographic Prints of Buildings, Grounds, and People, 1870–1920. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, St. Elizabeth Hospital (04/11/1953–08/09/1967). Records of St. Elizabeths Hospital, 1820–1981. Record Group 418, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

Photographs of Structures at St. Elizabeths Hospital, Washington, D.C., 1968. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Public Health Service, Health Services and Mental Health Administration, National Institute of Mental Health, Saint Elizabeths Hospital, Office of the Superintendent (04/01/1968–07/01/1973). Records of St. Elizabeths Hospital, 1820–1981. Record Group 418, National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

St. Elizabeths Hospital Historic Resources Management Plan. Devroux & Purnell Architects-Planners, PC, with Betty Bird, Historian, and Rhodeside & Harwell Inc., Landscape Architects. Prepared for the D.C. Office of Business and Economic Development and the Office of the Assistant City Administrator for Economic Development, Washington, D.C., September 1993.

St. Elizabeths West Campus: Cultural Landscape Report, Heritage Landscapes, Preservation Landscape Architects & Planners, and Robinson & Associates, Inc. Prepared for the General Services Administration. April 2009.

St. Elizabeths West Campus Preservation, Design, & Development Guidelines. Oehrlein & Associates Architects and Robinson & Associates, Inc., Architectural and Historical Research. Prepared for the General Services Administration. November 10, 2008.

- E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Extensive research on the history of the Comfort Station has been performed for this and other studies, as documented in the publications and other sources listed above.
- F. Supplemental Material: No historical photographs or drawings of the Comfort Station were discovered in research for this study.

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

This historical narrative was prepared by WJE in conjunction with Mills + Schnoering Architects, LLC, who prepared the measured drawings, and Leslie Schwartz Photography, who prepared the photographic documentation. The HABS documentation was completed for the General Services Administration.