

ST. ELIZABETHS HOSPITAL, TOOL HOUSE
(Building No. 53)
2700 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, Southeast, Holly Street
Southeast
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS DC-349-BI
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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, TOOL HOUSE (BUILDING 53)

HABS NO. DC-349-BI

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

Present Owner: General Services Administration, United States Government

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

Significance: The Tool House is significant for its association with the development of campus-wide infrastructure to support the west campus of St. Elizabeths. Constructed in 1895, the Tool House is a significant part of the campus plan as it developed during the Godding-era expansion. As the campus expanded beyond the echelon plan of the Center Building group, a variety of campus support and service buildings were deemed necessary, including the Tool House. The building is representative of the intended self-sufficiency of the campus at that time. The Tool House is also significant for its architectural design. Although it is a small and vernacular structure, it is significant for its use of a different palette of materials than is typical of buildings on the west campus. The Tool House represents the application of local vernacular construction techniques and locally available, character-defining materials such as fieldstone and wood to a service building on the campus.

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: 1895¹
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 Tool House was constructed in 1895, 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

¹ *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, 72.

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 sought 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 control of the Tool House until 2004, when the property was transferred to the General Services Administration.⁴ The campus facilities were stabilized and the buildings were mothballed by 2005.

From its initial construction until the end of its use, the Tool House was used to store groundskeeper's equipment and supplies for maintaining the landscaped areas of the west campus.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not known
5. Original plans and construction: The Tool House was constructed as a one-and-a-half-story wood-framed structure with raised basement, brick and stone foundation, wood-framed gable roof, and horizontal wood clapboard. The structure had wood-framed openings with six-over-six double-hung windows and a single centered door on the south facade. The structure was built using the "hall-and-parlor" house form characteristic of the period and was situated on the west side of campus, near Howard Hall (no longer extant). The west facade had a sliding barn door, while the east facade had a wood-framed door located at the basement level. The interior consisted of a dirt basement floor, wood plank first floor, and exposed wood framing throughout.⁵
6. Alterations and additions: The Tool House is a utilitarian building and was not substantially altered following original construction. Changes to the building relate primarily to ongoing maintenance. In 1940, the original wood shingle roofing was removed and replaced with composite roofing.⁶ Sometime after 1945 but prior to 1968, the exterior window frames were painted, and gutters with downspouts were added along the roof line.⁷ Sometime prior to 1991, the roof was again re-covered, with new asphalt shingles.⁸

Sometime after 1968, vinyl siding was installed over the wood siding, including covering over the center door on the north and south facades. The gutters and downspouts were removed.⁹ Also, a

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

³ 1970 *Annual Report*.

⁴ *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, V.2.

⁵ *Historic Resources Management Plan*, 72; 1897 archival photograph.

⁶ 1940 *Annual Report* and 1945 Public Buildings Administration survey.

⁷ Based on comparison of 1945 archival photographs (GSA archive database no. DC1462SE0-P009) and 1968 (GSA archive database no. DC1462SE0-P001).

⁸ Based on comparison of 1945 Public Buildings Administration survey and 1993 *Historic Resources Management Plan*, building inventory.

⁹ Based on comparison of 1968 (GSA archive database no. DC1462SE0-P001) and 2003 (GSA archive database no. DC1462SE0-P003) historic photographs. Physical evidence suggests that the vinyl siding was installed after the plywood sheathing was applied to the interior structure. The deduction is based on the treatment of the south entrance door which is cut out of the interior plywood but covered by the exterior vinyl.

cast-in-place concrete retaining wall was erected abutting the stone foundation wall on the east elevation. The retaining wall is approximately 4 feet tall (above grade) and is 6 inches thick.¹⁰

Alterations to the interior are not documented, but the existing plywood sheathing and partitions were installed prior to 1991.¹¹

The building was stabilized and mothballed by 2005. As part of the construction of a new headquarters for the United States Coast Guard on the St. Elizabeths West Campus, the Storage Building was demolished on September 2 , 2009.

B. Historical context¹²

In 1852, St. Elizabeths Hospital was established in large part through the efforts of Dorothea Lynde Dix, who led a national crusade for the ethical and humane treatment of the mentally ill. Under the direction of Superintendent Charles Nichols (1852–1877), the hospital endeavored to become a curative treatment center for the mentally ill of Washington, D.C., and the United States Army and Navy. Patients were grouped into wards by their perceived mental condition and emphasis was placed on creating a peaceful, healthy, and serene family environment in which to rehabilitate.

In 1877, William Godding assumed control of St. Elizabeths Hospital and adopted the principles of his predecessor. Through the moral treatment of patients, it was believed that mental illness could be cured. During Godding's tenure (1877 to 1899), seventeen free-standing ward buildings were constructed on the St. Elizabeths campus. With the rapid increase in patient population came the need for additional support structures to improve conditions and develop infrastructure. The Detached Dining Hall (Building 33), portions of the Greenhouse complex (Building 20A–H), and The Rest/Circulating Library (Building 40) were built to augment the limited space in the cottage plan buildings, facilitate patient rehabilitation, and initiate scientific research. Infrastructure projects, such as the construction of the Boiler House/Ice Plant (Building 52), the General Kitchen (Building 45), Engine House/Fire House (Building 41), and expansion of the Laundry Building (also known as the Construction Shops, Building 49) were aimed at developing St. Elizabeths Hospital as a self-sufficient campus. The construction of the Tool House in 1895 was part of this expansion of the west campus maintenance and support facilities.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The Tool House is a one-story rectangular wood frame structure with a full basement and a gable roof. The rectangular building has a symmetrical design. The east facade has a centrally located door opening to the basement, with one basement window to either side; three windows at the first floor; and one attic window in the gable above. The west facade has a large centrally located door opening at the first floor and one attic window in the gable

¹⁰ Based on comparison of 1968 (GSA archive database no. DC1462SE0-P001) and 2003 (GSA archive database no. DC1462SE0-P003) historic photographs.

¹¹ Based on comparison of 1945 Public Buildings Administration survey and 1993 *Historic Resources Management Plan*, building inventory.

¹² A context history for the entire St. Elizabeths West Campus, as well as an overview history of the Shops and Support Structures Group, is to be developed under separate cover as part of this HABS documentation project.

above. The north and south facades are similar, each with two window openings and one centrally located door opening, now concealed by the non-original vinyl siding.

As an example of vernacular design using local materials, the Tool House incorporates character-defining fieldstone and brick masonry for its foundation wall and wood siding for its upper level walls. Other character-defining features include the symmetrical arrangement of window and door openings; original wood double-hung windows and four-panel wood doors; and original wood exterior cladding (now concealed by vinyl siding).

2. Condition of fabric: At the time of the field survey for the Historic Structure Reports/Building Preservation Plans project in March 2009, the Tool House was in fair condition overall. The roof had been recently replaced, and the vinyl siding was generally intact but with localized cracking and distress. The plywood soffits and fascia along the eaves exhibited some paint loss, checking, and warping. The interior walls of the basement exhibited efflorescence and signs of minor water intrusion. Eroded mortar and moss were present at the base of the exterior walls, and isolated areas of efflorescence were present on the inside surface of the foundation walls.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 21'-0" by 27'-0", rectangular building, 24'-6" to the peak of the roof
2. Foundations: The below-grade basement walls are constructed with fieldstone and carved quoins. Above the fieldstone masonry, nine courses of brick complete the above-grade portion of the basement walls.
3. Walls: Above grade, the walls are wood-framed and clad with wood clapboard. Vinyl siding with a similar pattern to the wood covers the original wood clapboard.
4. Structural system, framing: The building is a single-story wood-framed structure. The floor of the basement is hard-packed dirt. The first floor has 2-inch by 12-inch joists spaced at about 17-1/2 inches on center spanning north to south. The roof has 2-inch by 6-inch rafters spaced at 24 inches on center with wood plank decking and 2-inch by 6-inch ceiling joists, and is supported by the north and south exterior walls. These walls have 1-1/2-inch by 3-1/2-inch studs spaced at 16 inches on center. The remaining interior partitions and exterior walls consist of wood-framed assemblies.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, porticoes, bulkheads: Concrete retaining walls and steps create the entrance to the basement on the east facade. One of the concrete walls was cast directly against the surface of the original exposed fieldstone wall.
6. Chimneys: None present.
7. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: The west facade has a large, centrally located door opening. The opening is partially infilled with wood framing and plywood cladding, creating a pedestrian-sized door covered by a hinged plywood panel. Behind the wood infill is a wood overhead sliding garage door that is currently non-operational and is fixed in the open position. A shallow wood ramp leads up to the door.

The east facade has a centrally located door opening to the basement level. This door has a plain wood frame, and the existing door is a flat-panel hollow-core door. A wood-framed screen door is also present at this opening.

There is also one original door opening at the center of both north and south facades. On the exterior, both of these door openings have been covered by vinyl siding. On the interior, the original four-panel wood doors are visible.

- b. Windows and shutters: The first floor and attic have wood six-over-six double-hung windows. One non-original sash of the same size but with ten lights is also present at the first floor. The basement level has wood three-light inward-swinging awning windows.

8. Roof

- a. Shape, covering: The gable roof is clad with asphalt shingles and has overhanging eaves.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Originally, the eaves featured exposed rafters. Currently, the eave soffit is enclosed with plywood. There are no rain gutters.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None present.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The interior of the basement is a single open space with a hard-packed dirt floor. The first floor consists of a main open space with a single enclosed room in the northeast corner.
 2. Stairways: There is no interior stairway; each level is accessed only from the exterior.
 3. Flooring: The flooring at the first floor is unfinished tongue-and-groove planks.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: The basement walls are exposed fieldstone and brick masonry. The wood floor joists and decking for the first floor above are exposed at the ceiling. Temporary wood partition walls create shallow stalls along the south exterior wall. At the first floor, the interior surfaces of the exterior walls are clad with plywood. The partitions of the enclosed room are wood-framed walls covered in chicken wire on one side and plywood on the other. At the first floor ceiling, the wood joists and wood decking of the attic level are exposed.
- #### 5. Openings
- a. Doorways and doors: The only interior doorway is the opening to the enclosed room at the first floor. The door at this opening is a wood hollow-core flat-panel door.
 - b. Windows: The windows do not have interior trim or casings.
6. Decorative features and trim: None present.
 7. Hardware: No original hardware is present. The basement-level door has a circular iron knob. The door to the first floor enclosed room has a brass-plated circular knob.

8. Mechanical Equipment

- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The Tool House has no mechanical systems and was apparently unheated. There is a storage cabinet for volatile chemicals at the first floor that was vented to the exterior through a window on the west elevation.
- b. Lighting: The electrical systems consist of metal conduit and junction boxes run exposed across the wall and ceiling framing. Lighting is provided by porcelain lamp bases mounted to the ceiling joists at both levels, and two rectangular fluorescent light fixtures at the first floor.
- c. Plumbing: None present.

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 Tool House is situated at the fork of Holly Street and Ash Street. The landscape slopes south as Ash Street winds down to the Power House. The slope is such that the west end of the building's first floor is at grade while the basement door and portions of the foundation wall at the east end are exposed.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: None available.
- B. Early Views: Copies of selected early and historical views of the Tool House are included in the attached Supplemental Material. The original photographs and other archival photographic documentation are in the collection of the General Services Administration, the Library of Congress, the National Archives, College Park, Maryland, or the St. Elizabeths Hospital Health Sciences Library archives on the St. Elizabeths East Campus.
- C. Interviews: No oral history interviews were performed for this documentation project.
- D. Selected Sources:

Building Preservation Plan: Tool House (Building 53), 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.

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.

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.

- E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Extensive research on the history of the Tool House has been performed for this and other studies, as documented in the publications and other sources listed above.
- F. Supplemental Material:
 - 1. GSA archives, image DC1462SE0P002
 - 2. GSA archives, image DC1462SE0P001

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.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

TOOL HOUSE (Building 53)
St. Elizabeths West Campus
Holly Street SE
Washington, D.C.

HABS No. DC-349-BI



Figure 1. Source: GSA archives, image DC1462SE0P002.



Figure 2. Source: GSA archives, image DC1462SE0P001