

ST. ELIZABETHS HOSPITAL, LOCOMOTIVE HOUSE
(Building No. 55)
2700 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, Southeast, Ash Street, Southeast
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS DC-349-BM
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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, LOCOMOTIVE HOUSE (BUILDING 55)

HABS NO. DC-349-BM

- Location:** Ash 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 Locomotive House (Building 55) was significant as a context structure that contributes to the broader historic character of the St. Elizabeths West Campus. The building served as part of the rail system that allowed for the partial self-sufficiency of the campus, and was part of the continuing development and improvement of a campus-wide infrastructure to support the west campus of St. Elizabeths. The Locomotive House was a significant part of the updating of the campus to meet contemporary functional needs in the decade following World War II.
- Although the Locomotive House was a simple utilitarian building, the use of red brick in the exterior facades relates architecturally to the older buildings on 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: 1948¹
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, and remained so until 1940. The Federal Security Agency was a new government agency that oversaw federal activities in the fields of health, education, and social insurance and was in control of the St. Elizabeths campus when the Locomotive House was constructed in 1948. 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

¹ *Historic Resources Management Plan*, 81; 1945 Public Buildings Administration survey.

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

³ 1970 *Annual Report*.

Services with the creation of the Department of Education. The Department of Health and Human Services retained control of the Locomotive House until 2004, when the property was transferred to the GSA.⁴ The campus facilities were typically stabilized and the buildings mothballed by 2005.⁵

From its initial construction in 1948 until it was vacated in 2005, the Locomotive House was used as a train shed.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown
5. Original plans and construction: The Locomotive House was constructed as a one-story single-room brick and concrete masonry unit structure with concrete slab flat roof and brick parapet. The north and south elevations were composed of four bays of concrete masonry construction segmented by brick piers. Each bay on the south facade had a centered door opening. The east and west facade were composed of two bays. The main entrance was through a pair of hinged metal doors on the east facade. Two door openings were centered in their respective bays on the west facade. The structure had a shallow-sloped roof that drained toward an overhang on the west facade. The remaining three sides had a masonry parapet wall. On the north and south walls, the parapet wall stepped down 8 inches at the midpoint of the building, following the slope of the roof.⁶
6. Alterations and additions: The side door openings on the south and west facade were infilled with concrete masonry units. The repairs incorporated metal flashing and the masonry units differed from the existing masonry in color and composition. The date of this alteration was not documented in available resources.⁷

As part of the construction of a new headquarters for the United States Coast Guard on the St. Elizabeths West Campus, the Locomotive House was demolished on September 8, 2009.

B. Historical context⁸

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.

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 *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, 18.

⁶ *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, 81; 1945 Public Buildings Administration survey.

⁷ Review of 2003 photographs (GSA archive database nos. DC1463SE0P001 through DC1463SE0P005).

⁸ A context history for the entire St. Elizabeths West Campus, as well as an overview history of the Systems and Infrastructure Group, is to be developed under separate cover as part of this HABS documentation project.

In 1877, William Godding became superintendent 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. Infrastructure projects were aimed at developing St. Elizabeths Hospital as a self-sufficient campus.

During the tenure of Superintendent Alonzo Richardson (1899–1903), the St. Elizabeths campus underwent an expansive building campaign to reduce overcrowding and improve infrastructure. Richardson's tenure was cut short by his untimely death; however, his successor, Superintendent William White (1903–1937), oversaw the completion of the expansion project.

After Winfred Overholser took over as superintendent in 1937, new development at the hospital was concentrated on the east campus, while west campus structures were maintained through a cycle of upgrades and repairs. The minimal new construction occurring on the west campus was focused on improving infrastructure. The Locomotive House was constructed in 1948 to replace an earlier west campus train shed built in 1912 at approximately this same location.⁹

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Locomotive House is a one-story building constructed of concrete masonry units set between brick piers. The building has a shallow-sloped roof that drains toward a small overhang on the west facade. The remaining three facades have a masonry parapet wall. On the north and south walls, the parapet wall is stepped down 8 inches at the midpoint of the building, following the slope of the roof. All window openings have either been infilled with concrete masonry units or plywood. The main entrance is located on the east elevation. A concrete retaining wall abuts the south elevation of the building.

Character-defining features of the building include its exposed brick and concrete masonry unit walls and low-sloped roof with parapet.

2. Condition of fabric: At the time of the field survey for the Historic Structure Reports/Building Preservation Plans project in 2009, the Locomotive House was in fair condition. Exterior masonry and mortar joints were cracked and deteriorated due to water penetration.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: approximately 15'-0" by 39'-0" rectangular building, 19'-0" in height.
2. Foundations: The foundation of the Locomotive House is concrete slab on grade.
3. Walls: The walls are constructed of concrete masonry units set between brick piers.
4. Structural system, framing: The Locomotive House is a one-story building constructed of single-wythe concrete masonry units set between brick piers, and a roof assembly composed of concrete deck supported by steel beams.

⁹ *Historic Resources Management Plan*, 81; 1945 Public Buildings Administration survey.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, porticoes, bulkheads: None present.
6. Chimneys: None present.
7. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance opening, located on the east elevation, has a concrete lintel beam and is comprised of a double-leaf metal-clad wood door with strap hinges mounted to a wood jamb.
 - b. Windows and shutters: The building fenestration has been removed and infilled with concrete masonry units. Each previous opening is denoted by a concrete lintel beam and a short sheet metal drip edge to shed rain.
8. Roof
 - a. Shape, covering: The Locomotive House has a cast-in-place concrete roof slab that slopes slightly toward the west. The roof is covered with a built-up gravel-surfaced roof membrane.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: The roof has brick parapet walls along the north, east, and south walls. The roof has a slight overhang on the west wall; the eave consists of the exposed cast-in-place concrete roof slab.
 - c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None present.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The Locomotive House has one floor level with an open one-room plan.
2. Stairways: None present.
3. Flooring: The interior floor is exposed concrete.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The concrete masonry units and brick piers are exposed at the interior and are painted. The lower flange of the steel beams and concrete decking of the ceiling is visible, spanning between the brick piers that line the walls.
5. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: The interior side of the main exterior door opening has a concrete lintel exposed to view and a wood-framed spandrel panel that extends along the upper portion of the opening.
 - b. Windows: The interior side of each window opening has a concrete lintel and sheet metal flashing fastened to the interior masonry.
6. Decorative features and trim: None present.
7. Hardware: The exterior door has metal strap hinges that have been painted to match the door.

8. Mechanical Equipment

- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The Locomotive House was provided with steam heat through a direct radiant heating system of horizontally oriented and stacked cast iron pipes connected in series and mounted to the north and south walls.
- b. Lighting: The electrical system is minimal, with wiring placed in exposed rigid conduit. There is a plug-type fuse box.
- 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 Locomotive House is located in the ravine just south of Ash Street. It abuts the concrete retaining wall of the coal trestle just north of the Power House (Building 56/57).

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: None available.
- B. Early Views: Copies of selected early and historical views of the Locomotive 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, or the National Archives, College Park, Maryland.
- C. Interviews: No oral history interviews were performed for this documentation project.
- D. Selected Sources:

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.

Building Preservation Plan: Locomotive House (Building 55), St. Elizabeths West Campus, Washington, D.C. Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. Prepared for the General Services Administration, March 12, 2010.

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.

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.

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 Locomotive 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 DC1463SE0P002.
 - 2. GSA archives, image DC1463SE0P004.

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

LOCOMOTIVE HOUSE (Building 55)
St. Elizabeths West Campus
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Figure 1. Source: GSA archives, image DC1463SE0P002.



Figure 2. Source: GSA archives, image DC1463SE0P004.