

Chanute Air Force Base, Maintenance Building
(Building 55)
Curtiss Street
Rantoul Vicinity
Champaign County
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1185-J

HABS
ILL
10-RAN.V,
1J-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

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HABS No. IL-1185-J

Location:

Curtiss Street
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Rantoul Vicinity
Champaign County
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Present Owner:

United States Air Force
OL B, AFBCA
501 East Sopwith, Suite A
Rantoul, Illinois 61866

Present Occupant:

Vacant

Present Use:

Vacant

Significance:

From its establishment in 1917 as a military aviation school, until its closure on September 30, 1993, Chanute Air Force Base (AFB) has served almost continuously as a technical training center for the United States Air Force. As one of the oldest military installations in the Air Force inventory, Chanute AFB has played an important role in the development of the American air defense system. Since its construction, the area of the Historic District has served as Chanute's administrative core, and the design and construction of the buildings and structures within the District reflect the extraordinary growth of the installation just prior to and during the early years of World War II. It was during that period that the base was rapidly transformed from a collection of neglected wooden World War I-era buildings into the permanent brick and steel features that remain as the Chanute AFB Historic District.

In response to massive World War II mobilization, Building 55 was built in 1942 as a maintenance building. It is a contributing element of the Chanute AFB Historic District.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date(s) of erection: 1942
2. Architect: United States Army Corps of Engineers, Louisville District
3. Original and subsequent owners: United States Army, United States Air Force
4. Contractors: unknown
5. Original plans and construction: Plans for this building were drawn by the United State Army Corps of Engineers, Louisville District.

B. Historical Context:

Established in 1917, Chanute AFB is one of the oldest Air Force installations in the United States. During World War I Chanute Field provided pilot training and afterwards temporarily became a storage facility. In 1921, the Air Services Mechanics School was transferred to Chanute from Kelly Field, Texas. When the Wilcox Bill (49 U.S. Stat. 610) was passed by Congress in 1935, the large-scale expansion of Chanute began. In the next ten years it changed from a neglected World War I Field into a centralized, subdivision-type collection of brick and steel buildings. More than 200,000 military students would graduate from its various technical schools between 1940 and 1945 and over 1,000,000 students would pass through its doors before its closure in 1993.

In general, the history of Chanute AFB parallels the history of American military aviation and its built environment reflects the economic and military priorities, architectural styles, and concepts of military installation planning common to the Office of Quartermaster General (OQMG) and the Corps of Engineers (COE). Most of the buildings and structures within the Historic District reflect Chanute's "Great Renaissance" period (1938-41).

Building 55 was constructed in 1942 as a maintenance or storage building and is now a contributing element within the Chanute AFB Historic District. The building appears to be a combination of six temporary structures built in 1942 to meet the immediate needs of Chanute AFB during World War II. Its present style and details suggest that the original buildings were similar to the OQMG Series 700 Plan and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineer's 6627 series. Forty buildings of this original style were completed by Kuhne-Simmons Construction Association of Rantoul, Illinois in December 1940 and they may have also built these. It could not be determined when the structures were connected into one building. Building 55 most recently served as a Maintenance Office.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Building 55 is utilitarian in design and does not fit into an established architectural classification.

2. Condition of fabric: This building is in fair condition with both the exterior and interior having been heavily altered.

B. Description of Exterior:

Building 55 is a one-story, wood-framed structure (350 ft by 50 ft) with a 200 ft wing off the east side to form an "L". A small, one-story addition has been added to the north side, west end; the north end of the east side is two stories. The foundation is concrete block on a poured sill and the medium pitched gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The broken roof lines show where the original buildings were connected. The eaves are boxed and there is a verge board; circular, capped vents runs along the ridge line.

The walls of Building 55 are sided with particle board sheets with a coated exterior and finished with a metal strip at the corners; louver vents are in each gable end. Windows are eight-over-eight light, double-hung, wood-framed sash with plain trim, most of which are covered with aluminum framed storm windows. There are twenty-one entrances in the courtyard area, some single door, some double door, and some garage door.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: See attached floor plans.

2. Summary Description: The interior is mostly shop area with concrete floors and plain plaster interiors. Some office partitions are in the northwest corner of the building.

D. Site:

Building 55 is located on the northern end of the Chanute AFB Historic District adjacent to several other warehouse and maintenance buildings.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings:

Original drawings for the buildings on Chanute AFB are currently housed in Building 62, Chanute AFB, Illinois.

B. Historic Views:

A large collection of historic photographs is located in the Museum Building (Hangar 4), Chanute AFB, Illinois.

C. Bibliography:

D. E. McGillem and Associates, Inc., 1990. Historic Inventory Chanute Air Force Base.

King, Thomas F. and Paige M. Peyton, 1991. Chanute AFB, Illinois Historic Evaluation.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

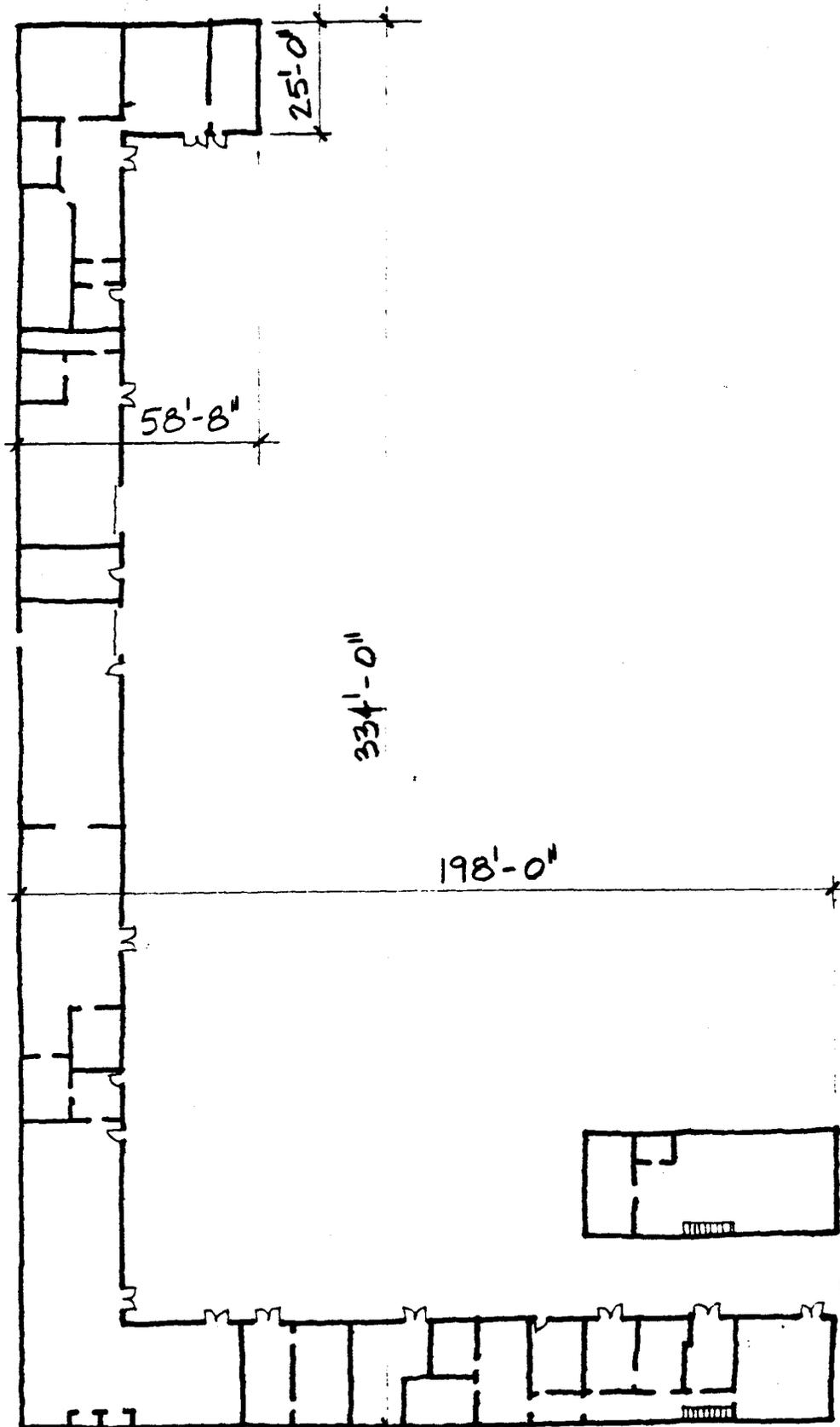
National Register and HABS documentation for the Chanute AFB Illinois Historic District is the culmination of the Section 106 process initiated during the preparation of the Disposal and Reuse Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Chanute AFB. The EIS was precipitated by the Congressional decision to close Chanute AFB as directed by the Base Closure and Realignment Act (BRAC) of 1988. A Memorandum of Agreement among the U. S. Air Force, the Illinois State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Eastern Division, has been drafted.

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GROUND FLOOR
DRAWN: 11/12/93