

Chanute Air Force Base, Quartermaster Maintenance
Building
(Building 56)
Curtiss Street at Sopwith Street
Rantoul Vicinity
Champaign County
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1185-K

HABS
ILL
10-RAN.V,
1K-

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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(Building 56)

HABS No. IL-1185-K

Location: Curtiss Street at Sopwith 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 56 was constructed in 1939 as a maintenance building and is now a contributing element of the Chanute AFB Historic District.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date(s) of erection: 1939
2. Architect: Office of Quartermaster General (OQMG), Construction Division
3. Original and subsequent owners: United States Army, United States Air Force
4. Contractors: William C. F. Kuhne, Rantoul, Illinois (foundation); McDonald Construction Company, St. Louis, Missouri (superstructure).
5. Original plans and construction: Plans for the 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 and, 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 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 56 was constructed in 1939 as a Quartermaster Maintenance Building and is now a contributing element within the Chanute AFB Historic District. It was initially used as an office, a store room, and shops for plumbing, electrical, carpentry, and painting.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Building 56 is utilitarian in design and does not fit into an established architectural classification.
2. Condition of fabric: This building is in fair to good condition. Both the exterior and interior have been altered.

B. Description of Exterior:

This one-story, rectangular-in-plan, steel-reinforced brick structure is approximately 125 ft by 75 ft with a six-bay front and a three-bay side. The concrete foundation with a beveled head rises approximately five feet above the ground.

The walls of Building 56 are red brick laid in common bond (five stretcher rows/one header row) with finely crushed stone mortar. The windows are set on concrete-raised foundations with concrete heads and current hinged windows are modern, two-light and four-light, that do not fill the original opening; metal awnings currently cover the openings. All of the window and entrance openings appear to be changed, except for two entrances on the west side that have a central door with flanking 16-light (four rows of four) glass-block sidelights above concrete planters; the doors are wood with one large light. Clapboards have been used to fill in almost all of the other original openings. Vents on the gable ends have flat heads and header brick lintels.

The medium-pitched roof is covered with asphalt shingles. Present features include boxed eaves, moderate vergeboard, and concrete entablatured frieze. The gable ends originally extended slightly above the ridge line and were topped with a concrete or stone cap but these were removed and the roof line now runs flush with the end walls. Aluminum gutters and down spouts are modern.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: See attached floor plan.

2. Summary Description: The interior has been altered with dropped ceilings, linoleum floors (some carpeted), and added wall partitions. Some of the interior walls are brick pierced by metal-framed doors and windows with wire glass, and multi-lights. The western end of the building has wood paneling trimmed with crown molding and some of the offices have wainscoting.

D. Site:

Building 56 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.

U. S. Air Force, 1940. Chanute Field, Office of the Constructing Quartermaster, Chronological Report of Construction Program, December 27, p. 5.

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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