

Chanute Air Force Base, Gas Generator House
(Building 39)
Curtiss Street, adjacent to Hangar 1
Rantoul Vicinity
Champaign County
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1185-AL

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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

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Chanute Air Force Base, Gas Generator House
(Building 39)

HABS No. IL-1185-AL

Location: Curtiss Street, adjacent to Hangar 1
Chanute Air Force Base
Rantoul Vicinity
Champaign County
Illinois

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

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Gas Generator House

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 39 was built adjacent to Hangar 1 in 1939 as a gas generator house to serve the technical schools and hangars. It is a contributing element of the Chanute AFB Historic District.

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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: J. L. Simmons Company of Decatur, Illinois
5. Original plans and construction: Plans for this building were drawn by the OQMG Construction Division.

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). The buildings and structures within the Historic District, including this building, reflect Chanute's "Great Renaissance" period (1938-41).

Buildings 29 and 39 were designed by the OQMG and constructed in 1939 by J. L. Simmons Company of Decatur, Illinois for \$11,553. Both buildings were constructed to service the technical training classrooms and hangars that were being constructed during Chanute's expansion for World War II.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Building 39 is a utilitarian brick building and does not fit into an established architectural classification.
2. Condition of fabric: This building is in fair condition; it has a 8 ft 1 in by 8 ft 1 in concrete block addition, with a flat roof to the southeast.

B. Description of Exterior: Building 39 is a one-bay by two-bay 22 ft 9 in by 42 ft 8 in, rectangular-in-plan, one-story utility building on a raised concrete foundation. The concrete extends approximately five feet above ground level and has a beveled head. The exterior above the concrete base is red brick laid in common bond over a steel frame and the walls are decorated with five sets of string courses, defined by a projecting

stretcher brick course and adjacent header brick courses above and below. The walls of the gable ends rise up above the roof line and the gable parapet is capped with stone headers. The non-gable end walls end in a decorative frieze of projecting stretcher string courses surrounding one row of projecting header dentils.

The major windows are on the southeast facade. Building 39 has two sets of windows consisting of three parts within a steel frame. The central part is 25 light (5 rows of 5) with flanking 20 light sections (five rows of four) and part of each is hinged to open inward. These openings have flat, projecting stretcher brick heads and sit on the elevated concrete foundation. There are grills over the windows. The building has two entrances; the larger one is located off-center and is a sliding metal door that has two sets of 12 lights over two inset panels. The door is within a metal frame that has a flat head and a concrete sill. The smaller entrance is similar, with a metal door that has four lights above one inset panel within a metal frame.

The low gable roof of corrugated metal has flush eaves and metal gutters. It is topped with low rectangular metal ventilators.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plan: See attached floor plans.

2. Summary Description: The interior of Building 39 is one room with exposed metal beams, brick walls, and a concrete floor.

D. Site:

Building 39 is adjacent to Hangar 1, between Hangars 1 and 2.

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.4.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

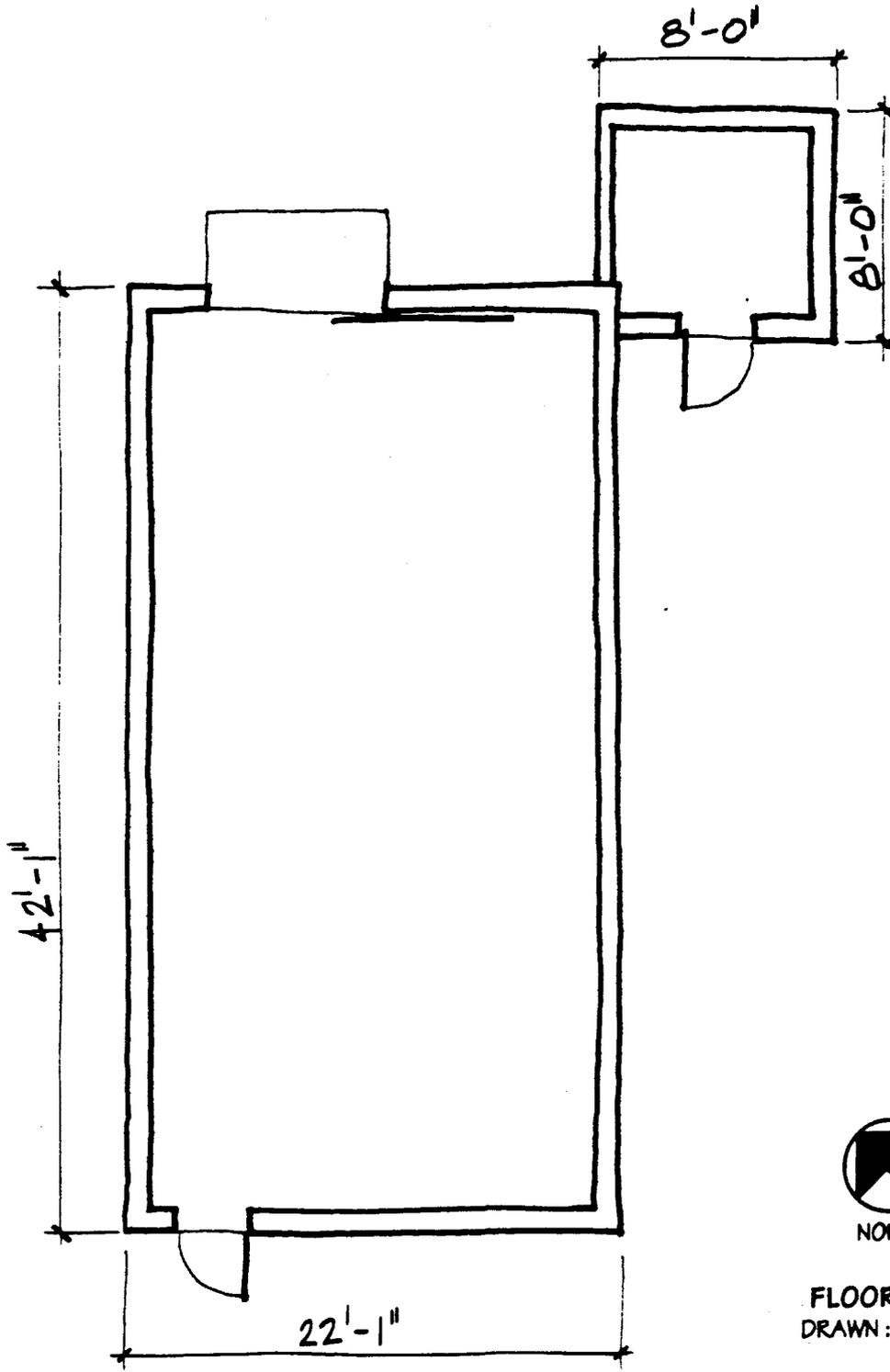
National Register and HABS documentation for the Chanute AFB Illinois Historic District is the culmination of the Section 106 process initiated during the preparation of the Disposal and Reuse Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Chanute AFB. The EIS was precipitated by the Congressional decision 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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NORTH

FLOOR PLAN
DRAWN : 11/12/93