

Fort Benjamin Harrison, Building 27
Otis Avenue, just east of Green Avenue
City of Lawrence
Marion County
Indiana

HABS No. IN-289A

HABS
IND
49-LAWR,
1A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Great Lakes System Support Office
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha Nebraska 68102

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

FORT BENJAMIN HARRISON, BUILDING 27

HABS No. IN-289A

Location: Otis Avenue, just east of Green Avenue, Fort Benjamin Harrison, City of Lawrence, Marion County, Indiana

USGS Quad: Indianapolis East, Indiana 1:24,000
UTM: 16.584110.4412120

Significance: Building 27 is of local significance as a contributing structure within the Fort Benjamin Harrison Historic District.

Description: A one-story, semi-subterranean structure with a side gable plan. The overall dimensions of the building are approximately 32 feet in length by 14 feet wide. The foundation is of poured concrete, approximately 12" thick, and approximately six feet below grade. An addition on the south side of the building is wood frame, with wood clapboard siding and simple corner boards. The walls on the north side of the building, are of common bond brick. The building has three window openings, one of which has been blocked in. Two of the windows are flat and one (on the north side) has a segmental arch head with radiating voussoirs. On the east side of the building is a door, with a segmental arch head, located at the basement level. The window on the west side of the building may have originally been a door, with entry below grade, which was blocked up by the asphalt drive at some point in its history. This opening is deeply recessed.

According to extant drawings, the building, was originally designed with a 75' chimney to the north. This was planned to be set on a concrete foundation, with a flue connecting to the heating apparatus below grade. The chimney has since been demolished. The gable roof has a wide overhang at the eaves, with rafters expressed and a narrow, plain fascia board. A plan of 1920 indicates that a corrugated metal roof was originally intended, however the present roof covering is

HABS
IND
49-LAWR,
1A-

asphalt shingle. Two metal monitors are set on the ridge line.

The building interior, at present is filled with debris, contaminated with hazardous chemicals and awash with storm water. The floor plan of the original building consisted of one enclosed room and the coal storage area, with an interior wall and doorway between them. The interior had concrete floors and common bond brick walls. The building originally housed a coal-fired boiler which generated steam for heating.

The alterations made to the building include the aforementioned demolition of the stack, and the replacement of the roofing material. In addition, the southern portion of the building was enclosed. Originally a coal storage bin, with concrete walls approximately two foot above grade, it was enclosed by wood frame walls which were emplaced on top of the concrete and a unified roof at some unknown date in its history. The exterior concrete walls in this portion of the building have spalled considerably, from exposure to the elements, and reveal a high aggregate content. According to a drawing dated July 21, 1943, a new boiler was installed at that time. This drawing also shows modifications to the interior wall.

History:

Building 27 was one of a number of small heating installations which were located around the post. In the days when coal was cheap and plentiful, this method made sense.

The presence of a number of coal furnaces was recalled by a young private, Arnett Roe, who served in the 1930s. Briefly, Private Roe was assigned duty guarding prisoners at Fort Benjamin Harrison. The prisoners were required to pick up ash deposits from all the coal furnaces on the post. A mule skinner drove a team and wagon around the post, while the prisoners, guarded by Private Roe, emptied the "many ash cans" into the back of the wagon. Private Roe considered this the worst job in his thirty years of military service, since experienced drivers were adept at heading into the wind,

thus leaving the prisoners and Private Roe to attempt to survive the suffocating effect of the swirling ash and dirt as they followed along behind. ¹⁴

Building 27 was constructed in 1920, from stock plans designed by the Office of the Constructing Quartermaster for use throughout the nation during the first decade of the twentieth century. A plan dated January 8, 1920, drawn by L. I. Starr is probably the genesis for its construction. However, the building was not built exactly as it was drawn. Notations on this drawing indicate that the entry stair was to be constructed on the east, rather than the west side, and the proposed location (farther to the north than at present) was changed. Buried steam pipe is also indicated, connecting the boiler to a shoe & clothing repair shop to the north, the auto repair shops to the west and the quartermaster's offices to the south. This plan is called "Proposed Central Heating Plant - Quartermaster Area", a somewhat misleading title, since it is obvious that the boiler in this small building only served the structures in its immediate vicinity (one of which was the Quartermaster Offices).

Building 27 was constructed as part of the infrastructure support for Fort Benjamin Harrison, during an era of transition and change between World War I and World War II. The post was still the home of the 11th Infantry and also served as a training center for many specialties, as well as Citizen Military training, National Guard, and in the decade following its construction, training for Indiana's CCC activities. The need for adequate steam heat to the service buildings which surrounded it was great, at a time when many different constituents were utilizing the facility. Activities such as repair and maintenance of the motor resources of the troops were critical in the mechanized warfare of the day.

¹⁴ Arnett D. Roe, "Fifty Years Ago at Fort Benjamin Harrison," 1984, 1,8. Unpublished account of life in the 11th Infantry Regiment, USASSC and FBH Historical Document Collection, Quoted in Bower, pp. 75-76.

When Fort Benjamin Harrison was declared "U.S. Army Surplus" in 1947, Building 27 probably lay dormant. But it was most likely brought back into use one year later when the fort became Benjamin Harrison Air Force Base, headquarters for the 10th Air Force. The Air Force only occupied the base for one year, finding it too overcrowded for their needs. By 1950, the post had been returned to the Army as an administrative and training center. Building 27, with a new boiler installed only seven years before, undoubtedly continued to serve its modest function of support as it had for several decades.

Building 27 was included in the Fort Benjamin Harrison Historic District nomination and is part of the district which encompasses several hundred acres in the south-central portion of the post. The building contributes to the significance of the district, as an example of a supporting structure, designed with Colonial Revival influences, to coordinate with the other brick and frame structures of the post. It is indicative of the type of structure constructed at Fort Benjamin Harrison during the era between the World Wars. Although not one of the early buildings at the fort, its design is complementary to the standard plan, typical of the earliest construction, the era following the Spanish-American War, which is so prevalent at Fort Benjamin Harrison.

Source: Brower, Stephen E. *The American Army in the Heartland, A History of Fort Benjamin Harrison, 1903-1995*. Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana: Command History Office, U.S. Army Soldier Support Center, 1995.

McGillem, D. E. & Assoc., Cardinal, Jare R., & David R. Bush, "Fort Benjamin Harrison Historic District National Register of Historic Places Registration Form", Indianapolis, Indiana, 1993.

Fogarty, Dan, Director, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, Indianapolis, Indiana, letter to Richard Blume-Weaver, Fort Benjamin Harrison, February 7, 1996. (plus attachments).

Fort Benjamin Harrison, Building 27
HABS No. IN-289A (Page 5)

Print of drawing: "Proposed Central Heating Plant, Quartermaster Area, Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana", 7S1, Plan no. 1, scale: 1/2" = 1'. plan made by L. I. Starr, Office Constructing Quartermaster, W. S. King, Captain, U.S.A. January 8, 1920. In the collection of Fort Benjamin Harrison.

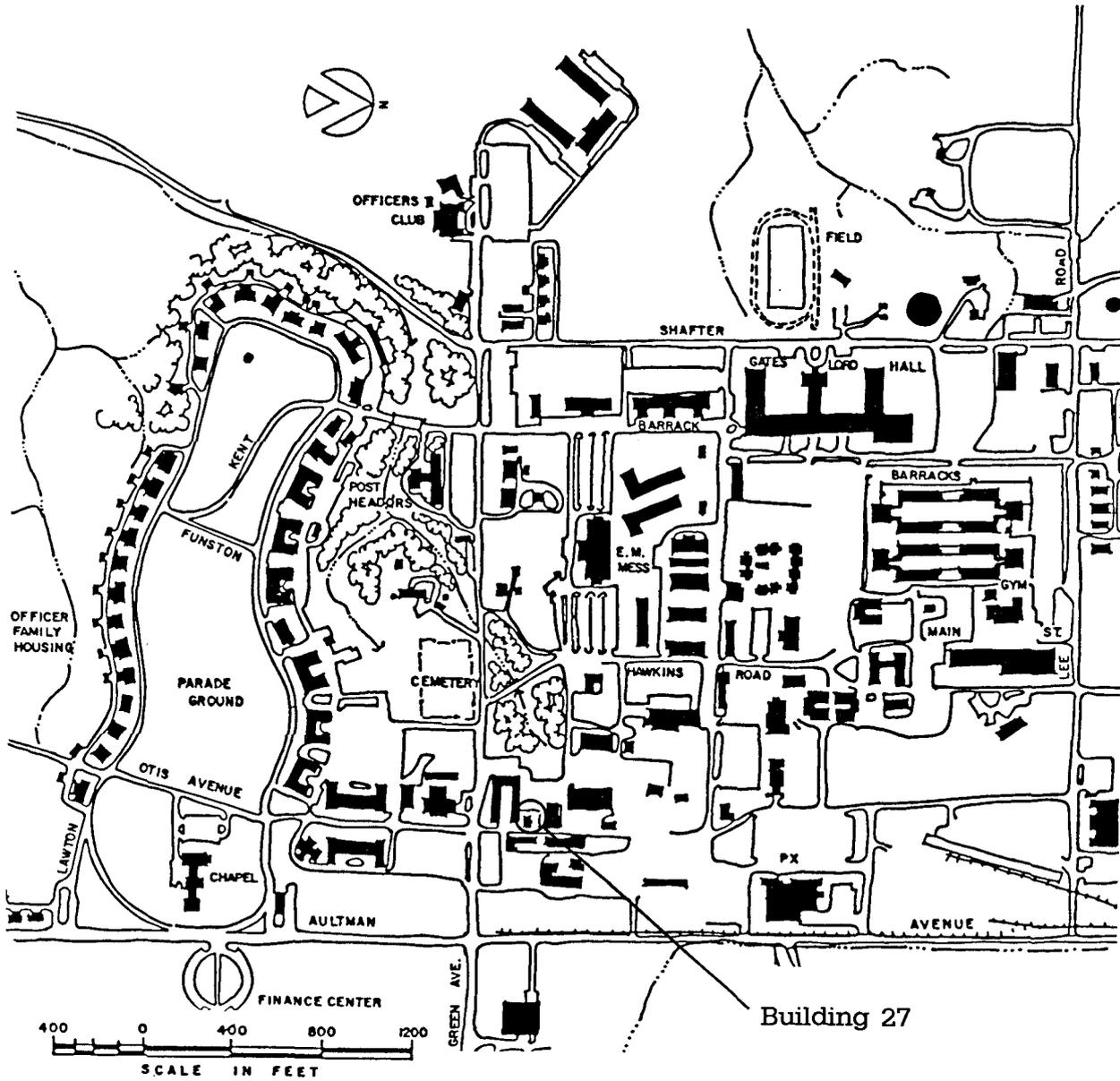
Print of drawing: "New Boiler Installation, Building #27, Office of Post Engineer, Fort Benjamin Harrison, Ind.", scale: 1/2" = 1-0', Drawn by Riley, Plan # (obscured), Date July 21, 1943. In the collection of Fort Benjamin Harrison.

Project
Information:

Based upon an agreement between the Army, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the State Historic Preservation Officer, Building 27 will be demolished as part of an approved environmental remediation action.

This documentation was prepared by Camille B. Fife and Thomas W. Salmon II, ASLA, of The Westerly Group, Inc., 556 W. 1175 N. Rd., Farmersburg IN 47850.

Location Map



Sketch Map

PARKING

