

Watertown Arsenal,  
Building 37  
Arsenal Street  
Watertown  
Middlesex County  
Massachusetts

HAER No. MA-20-B

HAER  
MASS,  
9-WATO,  
5B-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

ADDENDUM TO  
WATERTOWN ARSENAL, BUILDING NO. 37  
(West Timber Storehouse)  
Arsenal Street  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
Northeast Field Area  
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200 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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191 pages of overview narrative documentation for HAER No. MA-20 and seven photographs for HAER No. MA-20-B were previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

**Location:** Arsenal Street, Watertown, Middlesex County, Massachusetts.  
  
UTM: 19.321780.4692040  
USGS QUAD: Newton, Massachusetts

**Engineer/Architect:** Unknown.

**Date of Construction:** 1851; modifications in 1892, 1894, 1896, 1909, 1911, 1918, 1951 (roof), and 1969.

**Present Owner:** U.S. Army Materials Technology Laboratories (AMTL)  
Arsenal Street  
Watertown, Massachusetts 02172

**Present Use:** Vehicles, buildings and grounds maintenance shop and related storage and offices; safety office, facilities engineering office.

**Significance:** Building No. 37, the West Timber Storehouse, is the earliest building on the present AMTL property and was integral to the industrial development of the Watertown Arsenal after 1850. It was originally erected to store and dry timber used in gun carriage production, a primary manufacturing activity at Watertown Arsenal. It matched an earlier timber storehouse which once stood to the east. Along with three buildings to the west and north (43, HAER No. MA-20-C, 312; HAER No. MA-20-F; and 313, HAER No. MA-20-G) constructed between 1862 and 1894, it formed part of a tightly functioning gun carriage manufacturing complex. In the 1890s, it was converted to an iron and brass foundry to meet new technological requirements. Since 1918, the building has been used for maintenance and, later, also as division offices.

**Project Information:** This documentation was undertaken in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, prior to base realignment and closure.

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## I. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND MODIFICATIONS

Building No. 37, also known historically at different times as the West Timber Storehouse, Foundry, and Maintenance Shop, is the southeasternmost building of the Watertown Arsenal gun carriage manufacturing complex on the present-day AMTL property. Paved roads surround the building on four sides -- Talcott Avenue (east), Kingsbury Avenue (south), Thornton Avenue (west), and Wheeler Avenue (north). Adjacent landuse consists of gun carriage manufacturing complex buildings to the west and north; tree-lined Talcott Avenue, the main entrance road of the present-day AMTL property to the east; and a parking lot to the south.

As it stands today, Building No. 37 is a red brick, high-bay, rectangular building (302 ft. by 55 ft.), with its main roof ridgeline running east-west, its primary elevation oriented east facing Talcott Avenue, and additions along the south and north elevations. Due to its history of multiple uses, the building has undergone numerous exterior and interior changes. Its massing, regular fenestration arrangement, masonry materials, and its physical relationship to associated buildings, however, remains largely intact.

At its original construction in 1851 as a timber storehouse, Building No. 37 was a two-story, brick structure, measuring 189 ft. 8 in. (14 bays) long by 55 ft. (3 bays) wide, with a timber truss, slate gable roof. It had an arcaded first story formed by tall round-arch windows extending up from ground level, with fanlights. The arches were set between weight-bearing piers with sandstone springers that formed a broken stringcourse around the building. Segmental-arch windows with pairs of double-hung sash and sandstone lug sills on the upper level provided additional ventilation. The east and west ends, containing the primary entrances, were originally identical. They had a three-bay arrangement of round-arch openings, consisting of a central large doorway, windows to either side, and three windows in the upper level. The roof was most likely a timber truss sheathed in slate.

The main block consists of the original east section, constructed in 1851, and a matching 119-ft. west extension erected in 1896. A one-story, one-bay-deep, shed-roof, lean-to addition, added in 1909 as a pattern storage area, extends the full length of the north elevation. Its design repeats the arcaded wall treatment, and at the east end, the brick dentil course of the main building. A series of four additions cover the full length of the south elevation. East-to-west and chronologically they are: a one-story, shed-roof lean-to (foundry furnace, 1892) with segmental-arch openings (now bricked in); two, two-story gabled pavilions (furnace and materials storage, 1894 and 1911) with segmental-arch openings (now bricked in); and a one-story, shed-roof garage (maintenance garage, 1969) with flat-top garage bay openings.

Several chimneys and additions to the south elevation have been removed. The additions, demolished in 1968, included a two-story, gable-roof, brick-and-corrugated metal addition with a clerestory roof located along the west section of the south side and known as Building No. 37 South. It was constructed circa 1911 to 1918 to house a furnace; the site is now occupied by the 1969 garage addition. Attached to Building No. 37 South was Building No. 292, a one-story, shed-roof, brick garage constructed about 1917. It was sited parallel to, and ran the full length of, Building No. 37. It was used for motor pool vehicle storage and maintenance. An associated motor pool structure, Building No. 291, sat perpendicular to the southwest corner of Building No. 292. Both were demolished in 1968. (Please refer to accompanying sketch plan).

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The main section of Building No. 37 rests on a foundation of smooth-face, coursed granite ashlar with a granite water table. The southeast lean-to addition and the eastern of two pavilions attached to the south elevation also rest on granite, while the other three additions have concrete foundations. The red brick bearing walls are laid up in common bond with a 7/1 Flemish header course. Minimal masonry detailing includes a brick header dentil course with returns on the east and west gable ends and the two south pavilions. The east facade contains a sandstone stringcourse on the first story and a sandstone datestone inscribed "1851", located in the gable peak. The gable roof of the main building is riveted steel Fink trusses spaced at 6 ft. and sheathed in corrugated cement asbestos with a section of corrugated glass skylights on the south side. The nearly full length clerestory monitor is also covered in asbestos. The present roof truss system most likely replaced the original timber trusses in 1896 and may have been covered with reused slate shingles. The present covering was probably installed about 1919. The roofs of the two south pavilions are Fink trusses, resheathed in corrugated insulated galvanized metal in 1951. The one-story additions have tar and gravel roofs. Copper roof flashing, snow guards, gutters, and downspouts were most likely reused when the roof was replaced.

Doors and windows throughout the building and all but the most recent addition were altered in 1968. Arched openings were either fully or partially bricked up. Original wood doors and window sash were removed, and new fixed or projecting steel windows with new concrete sills and new rolling steel, hollow metal, or plate glass doors were installed. The original sills were left in place below the new second story windows. The east elevation retains its arched door opening, now fitted with a rolling steel shutter door. On the west end, the doorway has been heightened and rebuilt with a flat top and a massive steel-and-concrete lintel. The flanking windows and the three upper level windows, all round-arch, have been replaced at both ends. Secondary entrances are located in the east end of the north lean-to; just west of the center of the north lean-to, north elevation; and in the eastern pavilion. The garage lean-to contains eleven garage bays.

The interior of Building No. 37 reflects modifications associated with changes in use. The main block consists of two large, unfinished open spaces separated by a concrete block partition wall constructed in 1968 between the original 1851 section and the 1896 extension. The floor is concrete, the walls are painted brick, and roof steel trusses are exposed. The first story arched openings are exposed, but infilled with brick or concrete block, with the exception of two at the western end of the south wall. The north lean-to contains offices that are finished with plaster walls, acoustical tile ceilings, and vinyl tile floors. The southeast lean-to, used for storage, is unfinished. The southwest lean-to is a modern garage with concrete block walls and no partition walls. The two gabled pavilions contain offices with steel column structural systems installed in the 1930s and functional finishes of plaster on wire lathe walls, acoustical tile ceilings, and vinyl tile floors. The eastern, one-bay deep pavillion was originally constructed against the exterior wall of the main building. Construction of the western two-bay-deep pavillion involved removal of the abutting section of main building wall. Massive steel I-beams and a new concrete block partition wall have been installed. Access via entrance and stairhall to offices in both pavilions is through the western bay of the eastern pavilion.

Little remains on the interior of the building to indicate the location of functions prior to 1918. The steel girder crane rails along the north and south walls and two 10-ton Whiting cranes with cabs, which were installed in 1918 in the west and east sections for use in equipment maintenance during World War I, remain in place. The exposed interior west wall of the eastern pavillion contains a stone or concrete lintel approximately 3 ft. long that is located approximately 5 ft. from the floor level. Attached to it are six iron pieces each consisting of a flat circle with a descending bar that has been severed. Its function is not known.

The most recent substantial alterations to Building No. 37 resulted from 1968 alterations associated with the closing of the historic Watertown Arsenal and the establishment of the Army Materials and Mechanics Research Center (AMMRC), now AMTL. Modernization changes, as discussed above, included the removal of original windows, bricked-up openings, along with the installation of steel window sash and aluminum frame doors.

Information on the early mechanical systems and changes through time in Building No. 37 is not easily accessible. As best as is known at this time, the building's original forge functions were powered by a pulley and wire system from the powerhouse in the Machine Shop, Building 313 (HAER No. MA-20-G). A rain-fed cistern in Building No. 313 provided water, and after about 1890, the Arsenal's water supply was tied to the town of Watertown's system. Steam radiators linked to the main powerhouse provided heat, and electricity was most likely installed about 1917.

## II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Watertown Arsenal was established in 1816 principally as a depot for the storage, repair, and issue of small arms, ordnance, and supplies for the U.S. Army, and, secondarily, for the manufacture of small arms cartridges. The original construction consisted of a regularly arranged quadrangle of similar brick buildings completed in 1830 and located east of the present-day AMTL property. By the 1840s, the construction of wooden field, siege, and seacoast gun carriages and their limbers and caissons, various ordnance accessories, and work in metallurgy and the development of cast iron guns, was underway. While the military continued to rely on private foundries for much ordnance work, and gun carriage manufacturing was initially an auxiliary responsibility to Watertown Arsenal's main ordnance storage, maintenance, and distribution tasks, nevertheless these industrial activities came to have greater importance throughout the course of the nineteenth century. Additional lands to the northeast and west were purchased in anticipation of expanding manufacturing activities. The earliest structure in the western section of Watertown Arsenal which is now the AMTL site, Building No. 37 was one of two identical lumber storehouses and reflects this initial expansion of gun carriage production.

The existing lumber storage areas were rough wooden sheds with plank walls and shingled roofs. As these conditions were unsatisfactory, presenting a fire hazard and providing improper ventilation that caused wood to warp in finished carriages, a new timber storehouse, the East Timber Storehouse (Building No. 51), was erected in 1847. It used fireproof construction materials and a well-ventilated design, which promoted wood seasoning, in accordance with general plans recommended by the Ordnance Department and previously employed for a larger building at Springfield Armory. An immediate need for additional space resulted in construction of the West Timber Storehouse, Building No. 37, in 1851 at a cost of \$13,721. The physical characteristics of these buildings marked the introduction of a new architectural form to Watertown Arsenal in their large size and high proportion of window openings to solid wall. Contemporary accounts also suggest that a variation on the recommended plan may have been employed in the structure of the second floor. It was hung from the roof framing rather than supported on iron columns, providing for unrestricted use of the first floor for storage of the heavy oak timbers that were the primary material for heavy gun carriage fabrication.<sup>1</sup>

Field carriages and their limbers (detachable, wheeled, front sections for field mobility) and caissons (ammunition wagons), were constructed of oak timbers with wrought iron reinforcement and were relatively small and simply designed. Seacoast carriages, by contrast, needed to be larger and more

complex to accommodate the more massive guns, which were pivot mounted on stationary bases. Carriages were constructed of cast iron, wood, wrought iron, and, at the end of the nineteenth century, steel. In all cases, carriage assembly consisted of numerous parts that were individually fabricated and not interchangeable. While the materials and methods of production of gun carriages changed, manufacturing at the Watertown Arsenal has always been characterized by small quantity and variety of products, assembled from many specialized parts, rather than large scale mass production.

During the first period of its history in the 40 years following construction, Building No. 37 remained essentially unaltered, adequately fulfilling manufacturing support needs into the 1880s. The subsequent evolution of the gun carriage manufacturing complex occurred as a result of increased demand for ordnance during the Civil War and the need to offset the sometimes inconsistent supply flow of ordnance from private industry. In addition, in 1859, the Ordnance Department formally adopted wrought iron as the standard carriage material for seacoast guns. The efforts of the Chief of Ordnance, George Ramsay, to enhance several arsenals in 1862 and 1863 included new construction at Watertown Arsenal in 1862. A Carriage and Machine Shop and Powerhouse (Building No. 313; HAER No. MA-20-G) and Forge/Smith shop (Building No. 43; HAER No. MA-20-C), immediately to the north of Building No. 37, along with the timber storehouses, established the early core of the gun carriage manufacturing complex industrial operations at Watertown Arsenal.

The buildings of the gun carriage manufacturing complex provided an integrated locus of production. Raw wood from the storehouses was shaped in the Carpenter Shop in the south wing of the Carriage and Machine Shop. Wrought iron processed in the forge was shaped in the Machine Shop in the north wing of the Carriage and Machine Shop. Other sections of this central building contained a powerhouse to run machinery and space for assembling carriages. A foundry for iron and brass castings (located near the Charles River), an 18-ton reverberatory furnace (located in Building No. 71), and a brass foundry (located on the site of Building No. 312) were also introduced in the mid-1860s and manufactured carriage parts.<sup>2</sup>

The 1860s expansion was executed under Thomas J. Rodman, Watertown Arsenal Commanding Officer from 1859-1865. The items produced at Watertown Arsenal during the war period included 100 carriages each for 10-in. and 15-in. guns, 100 limbers for 3-in. guns 30 carriages for 12-pounder guns, along with caissons, artillery munition, small arms ammunition, shot, bayonet scabbards, cap pouches, cartridge boxes, waist belts, gun slings, and related materials.<sup>3</sup>

While the first major changes to Building No. 37 and the second phase of its history did not occur until 1891, the technological impetus for the changes were due to the increasing use of metal, which began to escalate during the Civil War. Throughout the third quarter of the nineteenth century, numerous experiments and improvements were being made in metals. Thomas J. Rodman developed a highly innovative and successful iron casting process used in manufacture of the large 15-in. (190-inch-long) guns, known as the Rodman Gun, during the Civil War period. With the introduction of increasingly larger caliber seacoast defense guns such as this, modifications in gun carriage design and material to accommodate the heavier guns were also required.

During the 1870s, Watertown Arsenal continued to manufacture, at a much reduced scale, seacoast carriages for 8-inch, 10-inch, and 15-inch cast iron guns. The use of wood for gun carriages declined severely after 1865, and in 1879, installation of the Emery Testing Machine at Watertown Arsenal reflected the government's interest in resolving controversy surrounding the relative merits

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of cast iron and steel. The establishment, in the 1880s, of a new national seacoast defense program included provisions to enhance fortifications and update armaments. New carriage designs for field and seige breechloading steel guns, as well as the fabrication of barbette and disappearing carriages for 6-inch to 16-inch seacoast guns, were initiated. These activities culminated in 1891 when the Department of War designated Watertown Arsenal as the Army's gun carriage manufacturing plant, a counterpart to Watervliet Arsenal, New York which was designated the Army gun factory in 1887.

Between April, 1891 and June, 1892, structural alterations and mechanical additions were made to Building No. 37 to outfit it as a new brass and iron foundry.<sup>4</sup> The second floor was removed to accommodate large furnaces, core ovens, and swinging cranes for iron castings, with the west end equipped as a brass foundry. A one-story addition and a chimney was constructed at the east end of the south side to house an 18-ton reverberatory furnace. The shop was powered by line shafts and rope drivers connected to a newly installed steam engine in Building No. 313. In 1894, the furnace room was enlarged with a two-story gabled pavilion containing a larger core furnace and storage bins for fire clay, fire sand, and other moulding materials. The foundry provided capabilities for the production of castings of up to 30 tons and for experimentation and improvement in gun carriage castings. In 1894, it was the only foundry maintained by the Department of Ordnance for the U.S. Army. Continual increases in gun carriage size and corresponding changes in design and materials required adaptations in facilities. In 1896, a west extension was erected for use as a Machine Shop. Modifications to Building No. 313 (HAER No. MA-20-G) and Building No. 43 (HAER No. MA-20-C), as well as construction, in 1894, of the Gun Carriage Erecting Shop (Building 312; HAER No. MA-20-F) were also accomplished in establishing the modern gun carriage manufacturing complex.

In 1909, a new lean-to addition to house flasks and patterns of different shapes used in the foundry, as well as a lavatory and lockers, was added to the north side of Building No. 37. Previously, flasks and patterns were kept in the yard or a nearby storehouse and had to be retrieved and returned before and after use, causing time delays and inefficient allocation of manpower. The addition, along with railroad tracks to allow easier handling and movement of items, was part of an effort to expedite certain work tasks and introduce scientific management to Watertown Arsenal production.

That same year, as a measure to increase efficiency and improve the complex industrial operations, Watertown Arsenal's Commanding Officer, Charles B. Wheeler, initiated a review of the Watertown plant. Wheeler invited Frederick Winslow Taylor and his associate Carl Barth to study the manufacturing procedures at the Arsenal and make recommendations for improvements in accordance with the Taylor System of Scientific Management. Watertown Arsenal led other arsenals in the adoption of the system, which planned every operation of administration, management, and production work according to a scientific plan. No enlargement of the foundry was determined necessary, although shop organizational changes were recommended. Some of Taylor's recommendations were successfully applied at Watertown Arsenal, particularly in the machine shop which served as a model for other manufacturing arsenals. However, the reticence of foundry workers and a week-long founders' strike led to the passage of congressional legislation in 1915 that prohibited time studies and related wage systems at Government installations.<sup>5</sup>

As demand and volume of production of gun carriages increased at the turn of the century, the foundry was modified and enlarged. By 1907, the annual output of the foundry equaled 2,000,000 pounds of steel, iron, and bronze castings. In 1911, a 15-ton, acid-lined, open-hearth furnace was installed in Building No. 37 for forging and heat treating of steel used in gun carriage manufacturing and in the production of armor-piercing projectiles.<sup>6</sup> The western pavilion on the south side of Building

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No. 37 was apparently constructed as a sand storage shed for this new furnace. The furnace itself was most likely in an addition that stood where the 1969 garages are now located. The furnace produced 7143 tons of gross steel in 1913.<sup>7</sup>

The third phase in the history of Building No. 37 occurred with changes to the Watertown Arsenal spurred by World War I. Since that time, the building has housed various maintenance-related functions. In order to meet wartime production demands and accommodate a larger work force, a new, larger foundry was constructed east of the present-day AMTL property (Building No. 41) in 1917. Foundry equipment and chimneys were then removed from Building No. 37, and it was converted for use as the Ordnance Maintenance and Repair Shop of the Service Department, organized in 1918. The 1917 addition of the motor pool garage and maintenance shops (Buildings No. 921 and 922, now demolished) to the south side of Building No. 37 reflected the introduction of motor vehicles to supplement existing railroad tracks. The first motor vehicle was a Packard truck, brought to the Arsenal in 1912.<sup>8</sup>

Major Palmer was the first officer in charge of the Service Department. The department's role was to keep structures, equipment, and services in proper condition for efficient Arsenal operations; a particularly vital concern during wartime production. This consolidation of service activities remained in effect until 1922, when maintenance responsibilities reverted to individual sections of the Arsenal. In 1922, the maintenance shops were moved to Building No. 32, then to Building No. 311. They returned to Building No. 37 from 1931 to 1937. Long term improvements to the Arsenal's utility systems and short term buildings and grounds repair and maintenance projects were undertaken during this period through the federal Government's Works Progress Administration, Public Works Administration, and similar programs. The Arsenal provided part-time employment for several hundred men.<sup>9</sup> Some production work continued in sections of Building No. 37, including renovation of one of the lean-tos to accommodate a test specimen shop. The two gable-roof pavilions, former foundry sand sheds, were also renovated as office space during this period.<sup>10</sup>

Maintenance activities continued to be the main functions of Building No. 37 through World War II and into the 1960s. One of the many tasks carried out in the shops was the salvaging of shafts and tools by a newly introduced method involving spraying molten metal and retooling, rather than welding repairs.<sup>11</sup> Since about 1970, the building has housed receiving and supply facilities, a carpenter and metal work shop, offices, and storage space.

### III. ENDNOTES

1. Dobbs, 87. Burns and Bahr, 28-35. This document comprises the 191 data pages previously submitted to the Library of Congress for Watertown Arsenal, HAER No. MA-20.
2. Burns and Bahr 77-81.
3. Burns and Bahr, 75 and endnote 8.
4. A detailed description of these changes are found in Burns and Bahr, 84-87, and are summarized here.

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5. Burns and Bahr, 97-102. Winslow Taylor's involvement at Watertown Arsenal is described in detail in this overview document and in Aitken, 1960.
6. Dobbs, 45.
7. Burns and Bahr, 94.
8. Mather.
9. "History of the Service Department," 9-11. This document was prepared as part of the annual report requirements.
10. Foster.
11. Arsenal News.

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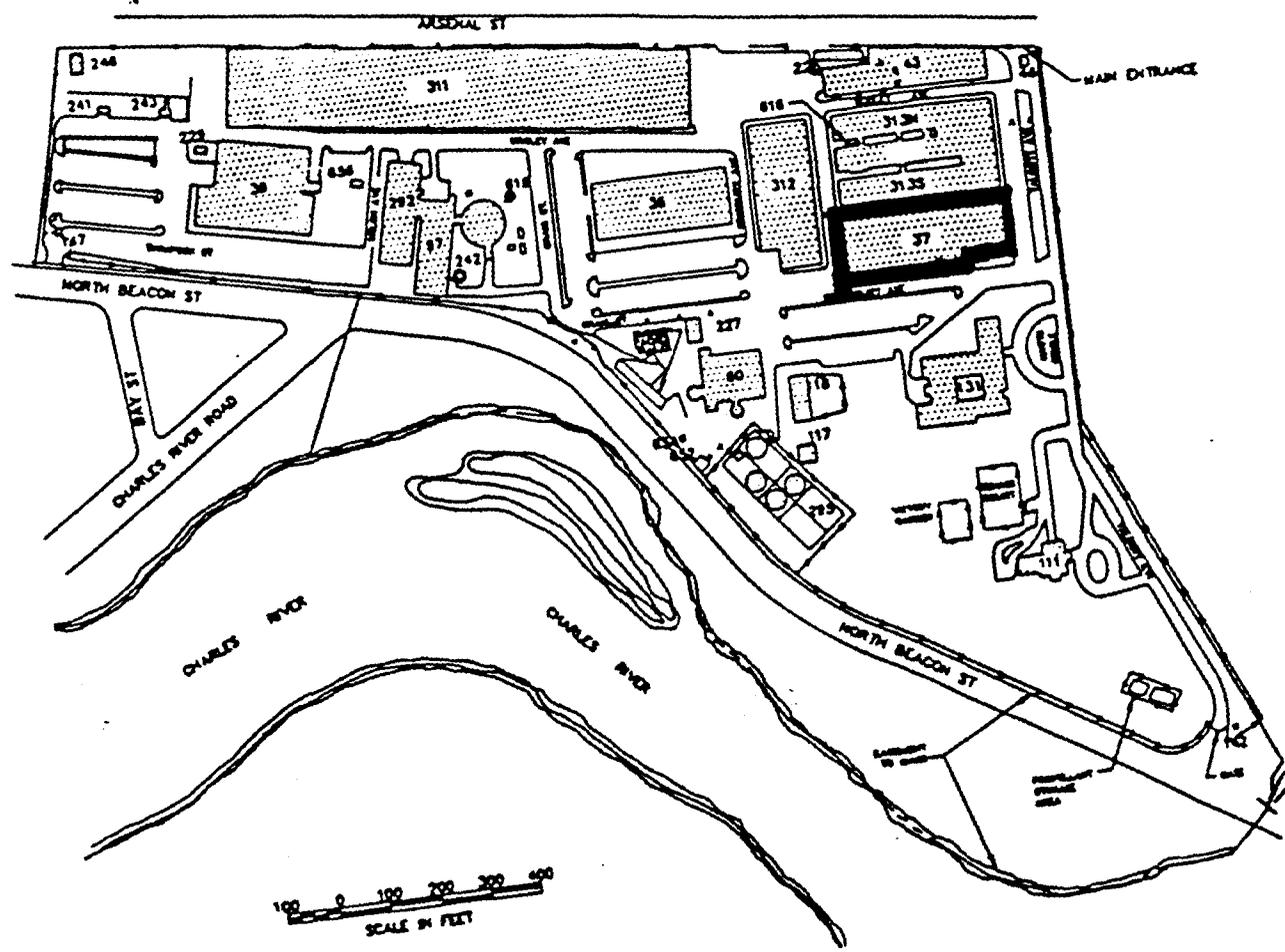
Watertown Arsenal. Arsenal News, January 20, 1944.

Watertown Arsenal. "History of the Service Department, Watertown Arsenal Historical Data, 1 April 1944 to 30 June 1944." Unpublished typescript, 1944. Office of Public Affairs, Army Materials Technology Laboratories.

For further sources, consult Burns and Bahr, 1982, previously submitted to the Library of Congress as HABS/HAER documentation for Watertown Arsenal, HAER No. MA-20.

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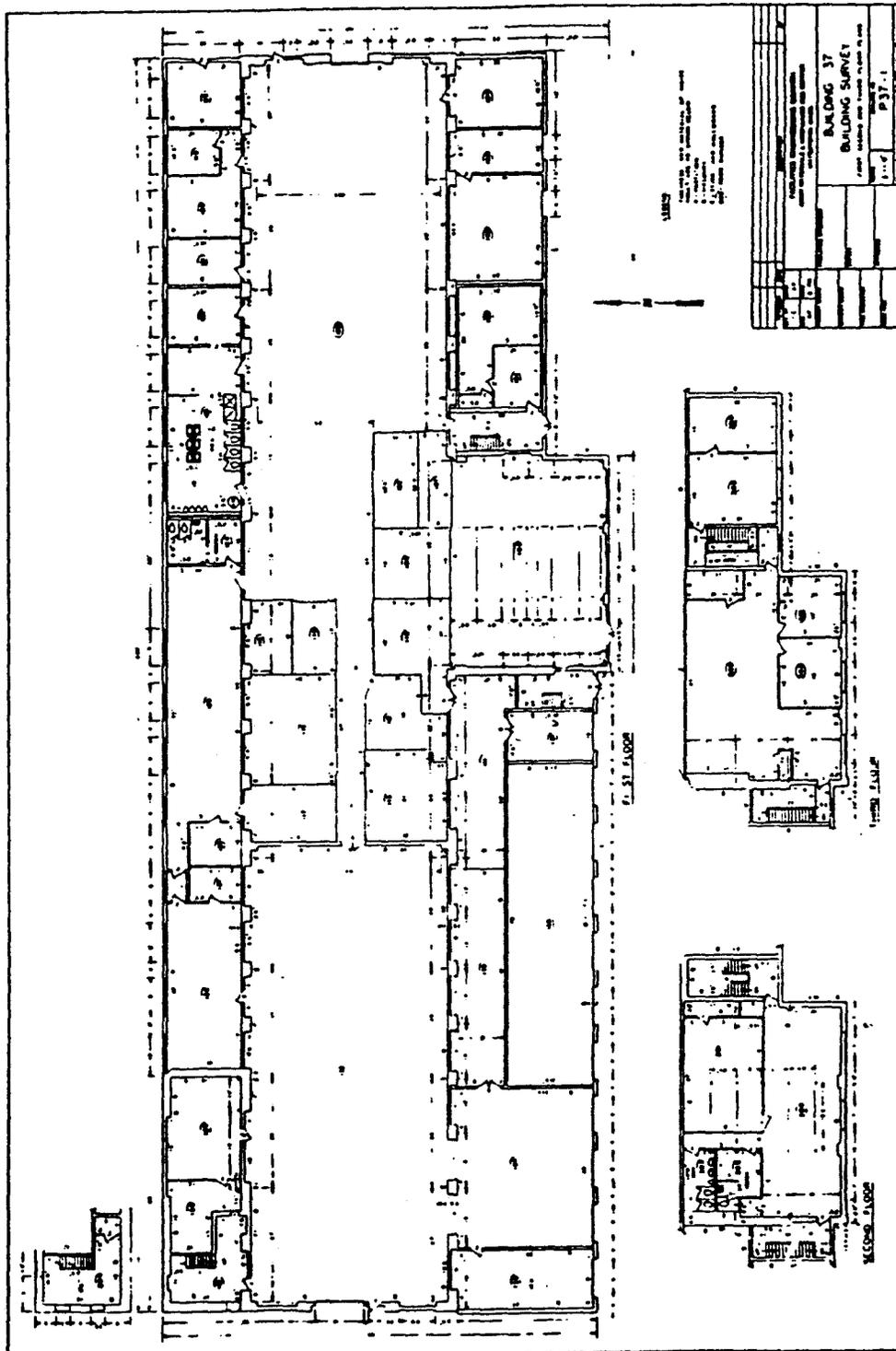
LOCATION MAP WITHIN WATERTOWN ARSENAL



Source: E. G. & G., USATHAMA report, 1988.

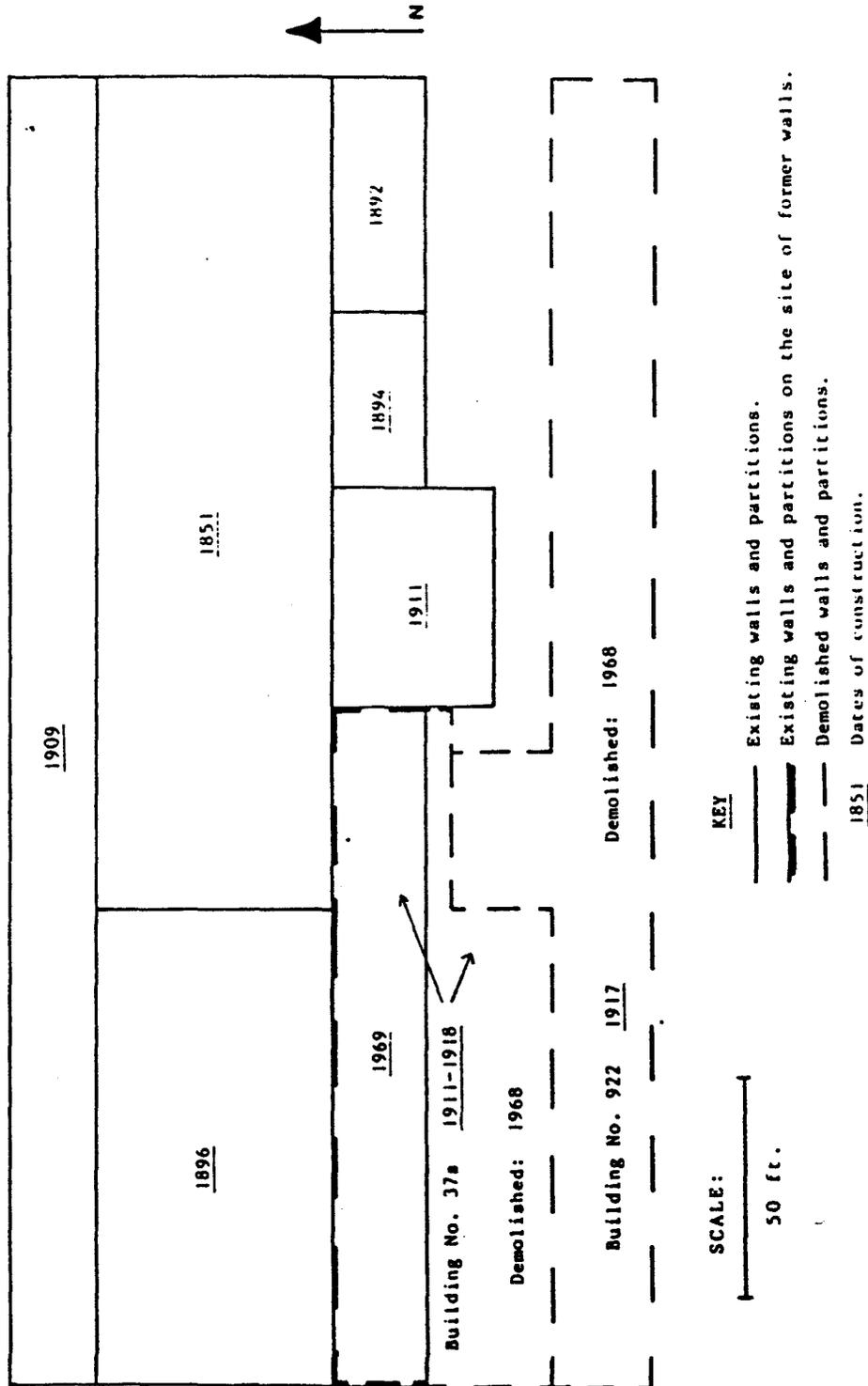
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1984 AMMRC BUILDING SURVEY FLOOR PLAN



Source: Engineering Division, AMTL, Watertown, 1984.

SKETCH PLAN OF MODIFICATIONS



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Historic Photograph, April 9, 1968. View of south elevation, including Buildings No. 921 and 37S, looking northwest. U.S. Army Photograph: Corps of Engineers, New England Division. File No. 830. (Copy located at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England Division, Waltham, Massachusetts).

