

U.S. VETERANS HOSPITAL, JEFFERSON BARRACKS, SPECIAL
SERVICES BUILDING

(Veterans Administration Facility, Jefferson Barracks, Building No. 61)

(Veterans Administration Hospital, Jefferson Barracks, Recreation &
Auditorium)

(Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks
Division)

VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division

1 Jefferson Barracks Drive

Saint Louis

Independent City

Missouri

HABS MO-1943-AA

MO-1943-AA

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

U.S. VETERANS HOSPITAL, JEFFERSON BARRACKS, SPECIAL SERVICES
BUILDING (BUILDING 61)

HABS No. MO-1943-AA

- Location:** Building 61, VA Medical Center, 1 Jefferson Barracks Drive, St. Louis, Missouri
USGS Quadrangle Oakville, Missouri
UTM Coordinates 16-----72557715 E---9965139 N
Lat: 38.509198, Long: -90.289432, point obtained using Google Earth on 9 March 2012
- Date of Construction:** 1957
- Designer:** Maguolo and Quick, Architects and Engineers, St. Louis, Mo.
- Contractor:** Unknown
- Present Owner:** U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- Present Use:** Recreation Facility and Auditorium
- Significance:** The Special Services Building was constructed as part of an effort in the 1950s to expand and upgrade the U.S. Veterans Hospital, Jefferson Barracks, to accommodate veterans of World War II and the Korean War. The building has a largely intact 1950s auditorium space with original layout and seats, and reflects an emphasis on the importance of recreational activities for patients at the hospital in the 1950s, a time when the medical center was being converted from general medicine to a specialization in psychiatric treatment. The building also appears to have been influenced by the theories of Dr. Paul Haun, a psychiatrist who was influential in shaping the designs of VA mental treatment facilities in the post-World War II years.
- Project Information:** This project was sponsored and funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as mitigation for the demolition of buildings at the St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, a property that has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places via consensus determination of eligibility between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources State Historic Preservation Office.

Description:

The Special Services Building (Building 61) is a one-story facility with a brick veneered exterior and a flat roof. The exterior features yellow brick walls and metal replacement windows and doors. The east portion of the building is rectangular and contains a theater space with a high roofline, so the exterior has two roof levels. The west portion of the building is U-shaped and contains the building's central corridor and northwest and southwest wings. The U-shaped west portion is one story tall and has a much lower roofline than the east portion.

The interior of the building retains the original layout and many original interior finishes and features, including the original bowling facility and theater. The building has a steel structural frame composed of steel beams, posts, and trusses, and in some areas has brick load-bearing walls. The building is situated in the northern portion of the medical center in an area dominated by recreational and food service buildings sitting on grass lawns.

The Special Services Building was designed to be entered through the enclosed above-ground corridors that connect this building to other buildings in the medical center complex. The Special Services Building is connected to two such corridors, one that leads to the Therapeutic Exercise Building (Building 63) on the north side of the building, and one that leads to the Chapel (Building 64), the Kitchen (Building 60), and all of the other medical center buildings that are located further to the south.

Since the main entrance and lobby of the Special Services Building are not accessible from the outside, the building does not appear to have a wall that the designers intended to be the facade; therefore, none of the exterior walls are referred to as the facade in this description. The description covers the main block of the building first, which is the bottom bar (east wing) of the building's U-shaped plan. The final portion of the description covers the southwest and northwest wings, which form the side bars of the U-shape.

The east wall of the building is composed mainly of the taller theater space, although this wall also includes two lower end bays that are associated with the building's western U-shaped portion. The east wall contains four doors and is a plain yellow brick wall. Three of the door openings on the east wall are associated with the theater space and have flat metal doors and small porches; each porch is composed of two brick walls and a flat concrete roof slab. Each porch wall has three square openings punched in as decoration. The fourth door opening has a flat metal double door and is situated atop a concrete loading dock. The loading dock and door are sheltered by a suspended metal flat-roof porch. The remaining sides of the high-bay theater space (north, south, and west) are covered on the first floor by the building's western U-shaped wing. The upper levels of these three walls of the theater space are mostly blank yellow brick walls, although there are two metal one-over-one windows on the theater's south wall.

The first floor of the west wall of the theater bay is covered by a one-story portion of the building that is associated with the lower-roofed, U-shaped west portion of the building. This one-story west wall features two small window openings, each with a single one-over-one metal replacement window, and three larger openings that each contain three one-over-one metal replacement windows.

The north and south portions of the U-shaped western portion of the building are composed of the southwest and northwest wings, described here in that order. The south wall of the southwest wing has yellow brick cladding. A connecting corridor that leads to other buildings on the campus is connected to the center of the south wall. On the south wall on the west side of the connector, the wall has seven window openings, with each window opening fitted with two one-over-one metal replacement windows. On the east side of the connector, the wall has six single one-over-one metal replacement windows.

The west wall of the southwest wing is blank except for a small louvered ventilator at the center of the wall. The north wall of the southwest wing has seven window openings, each containing two one-over-one replacement windows. The north wall also has one flat metal door, sheltered by a porch composed of two yellow brick walls and a flat roof. Each of the porch walls have three square openings punched in for decoration.

The north wall of the north wing has a connector structure attached to its center, and has ten window openings west of the connector, with each of the window openings fitted with two one-over-one metal replacement windows. The portion of the north wall that is east of the connector has five window openings: four single one-over-one metal replacement windows, and one larger opening that has three one-over-one metal replacement windows.

The west wall of the northwest wing features one window opening that contains three one-over-one metal replacement windows. The south wall of the northwest wing has six window openings, each containing two one-over-one replacement windows. This wall also has two flat metal doors; one of these doors has no porch, and the other door is sheltered by a porch composed of two yellow brick walls and a flat roof. Each of the porch walls have three square openings punched in for decorative effect.

The interior is composed of a main north-south corridor, with spaces for the bowling alley and other functions on the west side of the corridor, and the theater and associated spaces on the east side of the corridor. The corridor can be used to access the theater and other spaces in the Special Services Building, and it also provides access to the Therapeutic Exercise Building (Building 63) to the north.

The main corridor has walls of plaster and light-blue-colored glazed terra-cotta block, original blue-and-black-checked linoleum floors, early acoustical tile ceilings with fluorescent lighting fixtures, and original wood interior doors of several different designs.

Doors to the theater spaces are wood double doors with small windows, while the bowling alley doors are wood double doors with larger three-light areas of glass.

The theater area is composed of the main theater space, with seating area and stage, and a lobby space that now accommodates pool tables and is no longer used as a lobby. The former lobby has plaster walls and acoustical ceilings. The seating space of the theater has staggered plaster walls, and a painted plaster and metal lathe ceiling with a similar staggered pattern. The roof of the theater is supported by a series of steel trusses, with the plaster ceiling suspended from these trusses. The theater floor is sloped and is composed of a concrete slab with carpeting.

The theater has approximately 500 seats. The theater seats are the original wood seats and are arranged in three rows. The seat bottoms and backs are wood, while the end panels for the seats are metal and have an Art Moderne decorative pattern composed of vertical and horizontal lines. Immediately in front of the seating area is a sunken orchestra pit surrounded by an original curved aluminum railing. The proscenium's opening for the stage space is framed by a simple curved plaster molding. The stage platform curves out at the front and is accessed from the seating area via two sets of concrete steps. The stage platform has maple flooring, and a large, two-story backstage space is provided behind the stage to hold props and lighting.

The theater can be entered or exited through two sets of double doors that lead into the former lobby at the back of the seating area, and there are two additional sets of doors on the east wall of the seating area. There is also one set of doors at the rear of the seating area on the theater's west wall; these doors lead directly into the building's main corridor.

The theater also has a projection booth area that sits over the rear portion of the main seating space and can be reached by a doorway located in a hallway outside the theater space. The back wall of the theater space is clad in early acoustical tiles, and several openings in the upper portion of the wall are associated with camera equipment that was used in the projection booth to show films.

The bowling facility has changed little from its original 1950s appearance. A long, narrow space with plaster walls and older acoustical tile ceilings, the facility has six bowling alleys with maple floors and original 1950s-era automatic equipment to set the pins and return the balls. The area of wall above the pins on each alley is decorated with an original blue and gold motif with the gold crown logo of the Brunswick bowling equipment company. The bowling facility also contains original wood racks for bowling balls.

In the remainder of the Special Services Building, some of the smaller spaces such as the former library have been remodeled into office and administrative space. For the most part,

these remodeled areas have interior finishes dating to the last fifteen years, such as gypsum board walls, acoustical tile drop ceilings, and replacement interior doors.

History:

The Special Services Building's construction is related to a post-World War II conversion of the VA Hospital at Jefferson Barracks from a general medicine facility to a neuropsychiatric hospital. With the end of the war, a large number of veterans required medical and psychiatric treatment, and to address this situation in St. Louis, the VA constructed the John Cochran Hospital downtown for general medicine, and converted the existing Jefferson Barracks facility (south of the city) to a neuropsychiatric hospital. The John Cochran Hospital was built in the late 1940s and early 1950s, while initial new construction and remodeling for the neuropsychiatric facility was carried out at Jefferson Barracks from 1950 to 1952.

1940s Mental Health Reform and Post-World War II VA Neuropsychiatric Hospital Design

The conversion of the Jefferson Barracks facility to a modern neuropsychiatric hospital was related to a wave mental health reform at the end of World War II. Public demands for improved conditions were stoked by a 1946 article in *Life* magazine, written by medical writer Albert Q. Maisel. Entitled "Bedlam 1946: Most of U.S. Mental Hospitals Are a Shame and a Disgrace," the article exposed shocking abuses in mental hospitals.¹ By 1947, as part of an effort to build new VA hospitals, Dr. Paul Haun, a psychiatrist with the VA's Washington D.C. office, developed the "Schematic Plan for a 1,000-Bed VA Hospital," a general plan for psychiatric hospital facilities that recommended the types of buildings to be provided, as well as the number of floors and other details. This plan was publicized in the article "New Trends in Hospital Design," by Haun and Dr. Z. M. Lebensohn, in the February 1948 edition of *The American Journal of Psychiatry*.²

Haun's designs emphasized the importance of recreational and occupational training activities, and he tried to reduce the stigma of psychiatric hospitalization by making the facilities resemble resorts or college campuses.³ He recommended that each psychiatric hospital should have a multi-story admissions and intensive treatment building to handle both the initial observation and diagnosis of newly arrived patients and the various forms of intensive psychiatric treatment that followed the diagnosis. Haun favored the multi-story layout because it allowed doctors quick, easy access to patients and also made it easier to

¹ Albert Q. Maisel, "Bedlam 1946: Most of U.S. Mental Hospitals Are a Shame and a Disgrace," *Life*, May 6, 1946, 102-118.

² Paul Haun and Z. M. Lebensohn, "New Trends in Hospital Design," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 104, no. 8 (February 1948): 555-564.

³ *Ibid.*, 564.

contain the patients and secure the facility. Patients would stay in this building for no more than four to six months.⁴ If intensive treatment was not effective, the patient would be transferred out of the admissions and intensive treatment building and into one of several long-term care buildings for continued treatment. In contrast to the admissions and treatment building, Haun recommended that the continued treatment buildings should be low, sprawling structures of only one or two floors, which would allow patients easier passage to outdoor activities, an important part of Haun's treatment philosophy.⁵

The Function of the Special Services Building at Jefferson Barracks

Most of Hahn's schematic plan for a 1,000-bed VA hospital was carried out at Jefferson Barracks between 1950 and 1952. Facilities included in the Hahn schematic that were built at that time as new buildings included an admissions and treatment building, plus special continued treatment facilities for more elderly and infirm and more severely disturbed patients. A new kitchen facility and chapel were also built during that time, and existing buildings appear to have been adapted for the general medicine, administrative, and dining functions illustrated in Haun's schematic plan.⁶

However, the VA appears to have delayed constructing some buildings at Jefferson Barracks until the late 1950s; these buildings would fulfill several aspects of the Hahn schematic but perhaps were viewed as less essential. The Hahn schematic shows a combination pool and gymnasium building, and these facilities were added to Jefferson Barracks with the completion of the Therapeutic Exercise Building (Building 63) in 1957. The construction of this building represents Haun's emphasis on activities such as exercise to instill positive feelings in the patients of the hospital.⁷ The Hahn schematic also shows a theater and a separate recreation building as part of the 1,000-bed hospital. A small theater had been built at the Jefferson Barracks VA Hospital in the 1930s, but a large modern theater was not added until the Special Services Building was completed in 1957.

The Special Services Building was designed in 1955 by the St. Louis architecture and engineering firm Maguolo and Quick. Maguolo and Quick formed in 1945, with engineer George Maguolo and architect G. E. Quick as the principals. The firm designed mainly churches and hospital buildings. A notable project for the firm was the design for the DePaul Hospital in St. Louis.⁸

⁴ Ibid., 557-559.

⁵ Ibid., 555-564.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Larry Marks and Esley Hamilton, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form for the DePaul Hospital*, 1982, on file at the Missouri State Historic Preservation Office.

The Special Services Building has a very plain, cubic exterior in keeping with the International Style of architectural design that was highly influential at that time in the United States. While the building has the flat rooflines, cubic massing, and plain, functional exterior that are typical of the International Style, it does not have the more high-style features—such as cantilevered construction or large expanses of glass—that are seen on some of the more well-known American examples of the style.

The interior design of the building was also fairly practical and plain, with a central corridor. The theater was positioned on the east side of the corridor, and a library and six-lane bowling alley was on the west side. The theater was designed with approximately 500 seats and was equipped to accommodate stage productions and motion pictures. Facilities for stage productions included an orchestra pit and a full backstage area with dressing rooms. A small set of rooms to the south of the theater were considered music rooms and apparently contained facilities for musical practice and instruction for the patients.⁹

The theater also had a series of second-story rooms that included a projection booth for showing films, and a radio studio and broadcasting room. The studio was associated with a radio station operated by the hospital and staffed by patients. The radio station aired five days a week and broadcast music and interviews. The station was a closed-circuit facility and could be heard only on loudspeakers and via headsets on the hospital campus. The radio station was part of the hospital's therapy programs, in which patients were taught job skills as part of rehabilitation programs.¹⁰ Before the Special Services Building was finished in 1957, the hospital radio station was operated out of the Recreation Building (Building 24).

On the west side of the main corridor, the remainder of the Special Services Building was divided into a six-lane bowling alley with automatic pin-setting and ball-return equipment, a large room with four billiard tables, and a library that also included several small rooms for storage, restrooms, and space for volunteer workers.¹¹

The Special Services Building gave patients a modern space for recreational activities such as bowling, billiards, music lessons, and reading. The presence of new facilities for these activities likely made life at the hospital more pleasant. The recreational activities associated with the Special Services Building were emphasized in a 1958 article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, where the Jefferson Barracks VA Hospital was characterized as a place where patients were busy with therapeutic activities that would help them recover and return to normal life; the influence of Dr. Paul Haun was also showcased in the article.

⁹ Maguolo and Quick, Architects and Engineers, *Construction Drawings for Additions and Alterations, Veterans Administration, Jefferson Barracks, Mo., Special Services Building, No. 61*, 1955, on file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

¹⁰ "Radio Station Helps Patients' Morale at Jefferson Barracks," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 6, 1962.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Recreational activities described in the article included theater productions, musical performance, and movies.¹² Dr. Lester Drubin, the Jefferson Barracks VA Hospital director, stressed the importance of recreation and entertainment in patient life at the hospital, stating:

We want this to be as normal a life as possible. We don't want them to feel isolated from society for a time, then have the shock of returning to strange surroundings. That's why we try to give them the same things they would have outside the hospital: recreation, hobbies, entertainment, in addition to the therapy and treatment. And the time of admission is the time to start thinking about plans for discharge¹³

The Special Services Building is one of the least-altered buildings today at the medical center complex. However, several changes have taken place. All windows were replaced throughout the building in 1982 as part of a multi-building window replacement project on the campus.¹⁴ On the west side of the main corridor, the former library and billiard areas have been remodeled as administrative space. The billiard facility has been relocated to the former theater lobby space on the west side of the lobby.

The theater is largely unchanged from its original design, and the central corridor and bowling alley are also much the same as they were in 1952. Aside from the removal of the library, the building functions much the same way today as it did in the 1950s. Current plans for the remodeling of the medical center call for the demolition of the Special Services Building, and new recreational facilities for the medical center are part of the new construction that is planned to occur in the coming years.

Sources:

Haun, Paul, and Z. M. Lebensohn. "New Trends in Hospital Design." *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 104, no. 8 (February 1948).

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Maguolo and Quick, Architects and Engineers. *Construction Drawings for Additions and Alterations, Veterans Administration, Jefferson Barracks, Mo, Special Services*

¹² Mary Kimbrough, "Rehabilitation Is Goal at Barracks Hospital," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 6, 1958.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ U.S. Veterans Administration, Construction drawing files for Building 61, St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, 1950-2010, on file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

Building, No. 61. 1955. On file at St. Louis VA Hospital, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

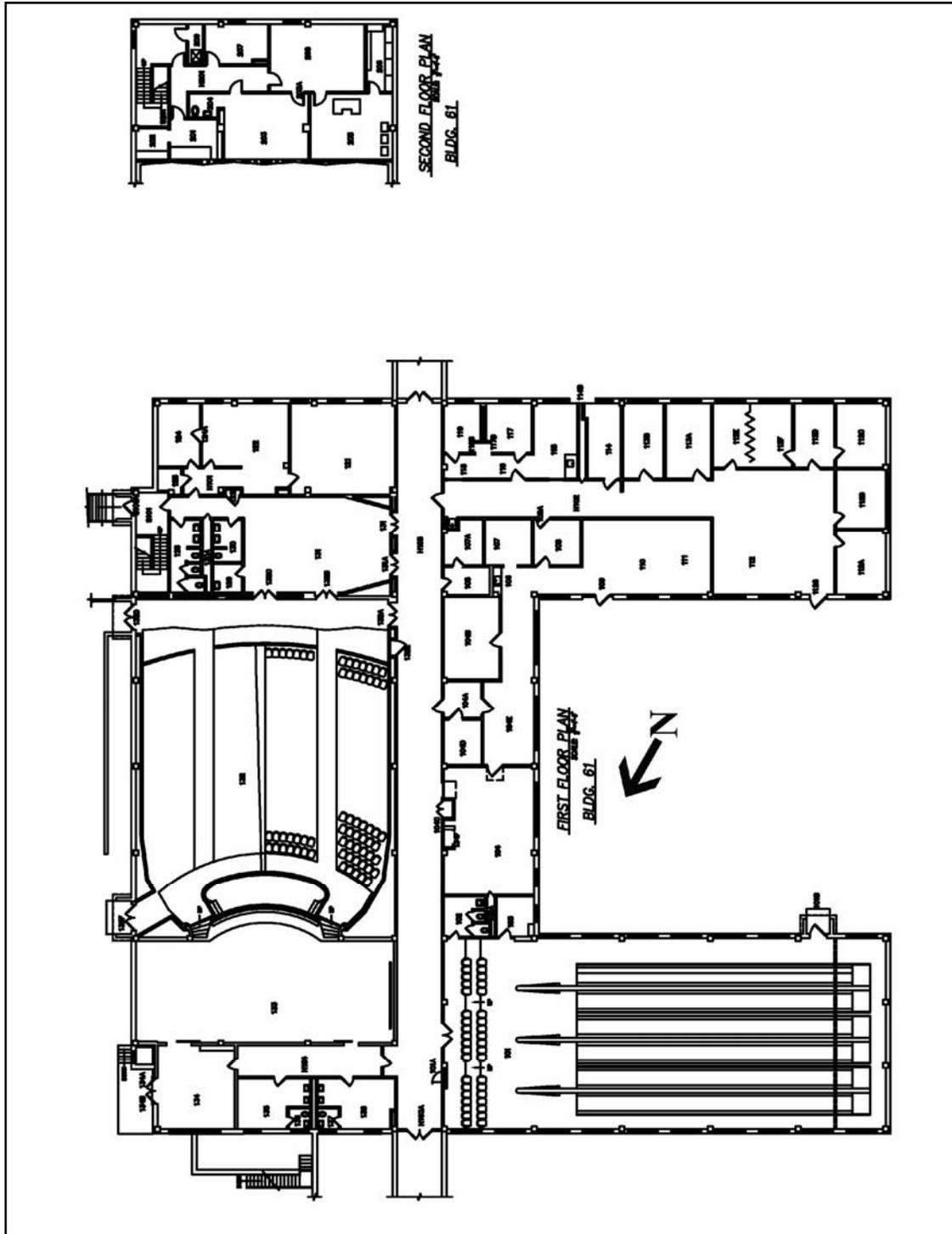
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U.S. Veterans Administration. Construction drawing files for Building 61, St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division. 1950-2010. On file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

Historians: Maria Burkett, Roy Hampton
Hardlines Design Company
4608 Indianola Avenue
Columbus, Ohio 43214
Tel: 614-784-8733
Fax: 614-786-9336



Special Services Building (Building 61), current floor plans