

U.S. VETERANS HOSPITAL, JEFFERSON BARRACKS,
THERAPEUTIC EXERCISE BUILDING
(Veterans Administration Facility, Jefferson Barracks, Building No. 63)
(Veterans Administration Hospital, Jefferson Barracks, Gymnasium &
Pool)
(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-AB
MO-1943-AB

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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U.S. VETERANS HOSPITAL, JEFFERSON BARRACKS, THERAPEUTIC EXERCISE BUILDING (BUILDING 63)

HABS No. MO-1943-AB

- Location:** Building 63, VA Medical Center, 1 Jefferson Barracks Drive,
St. Louis, Missouri
USGS Quadrangle Oakville, Missouri
UTM Coordinates -16-----7257579-E-----9965139N
Lat: 38.509198, Long: -90.289432, 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:** Gymnasium and Swimming Pool
- Significance:** The Therapeutic Exercise Building was constructed as part of a 1950s expansion of the U.S. Veterans Hospital, Jefferson Barracks, to accommodate veterans of World War II and the Korean War. The building also represents the 1950s-era conversion of the medical center to psychiatric treatment facility, and the recognition of the importance of therapeutic exercise for patients of the psychiatric hospital. The building was originally built and used as an exercise facility for hospital patients, and offered a swimming pool and a spacious gymnasium with a full basketball court. Today, the building contains a swimming pool and exercise machinery and is still used for its original overall purpose. The interior of the building is largely intact and has undergone relatively few alterations.
- 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 Therapeutic Exercise Building (Building 63) is a one-story yellow-brick-clad building with a flat roof. The building has three roof levels: the eastern (gymnasium) portion of the building is the tallest, the west (swimming pool) portion is somewhat shorter, and the south (administrative) portion is considerably shorter. While most of the buildings of the medical center have concrete structural frames, the structure of the Therapeutic Exercise Building is composed primarily of brick masonry walls and steel posts, beams, and trusses. Steel was probably chosen because of the large open spaces needed for the gymnasium and the pool, and steel trusses are able to span wide spaces without any underlying supports. The interior is highly intact, with the pool and gymnasium spaces only slightly altered from their original condition.

The site of the Therapeutic Exercise Building is on the north central end of the medical center campus. The Special Services Building (Building 61) sits immediately south of the Therapeutic Exercise Building and is bordered on the west by a grass lawn and the Disturbed Building (Building 53), which now functions as a nursing home. On the east and north sides, the Therapeutic Exercise Building faces Jefferson Drive and the boundary fence that separates the medical center from the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery.

The Therapeutic Exercise Building was built without a formal main entrance. Since the building was associated with a medical center, patients generally entered the facility through a connecting corridor on the south side of the building. This corridor provided access to the Special Services Building (Building 61) to the south, and connected to other corridors that linked to all of the major buildings of the medical center. The Therapeutic Exercise Building has several other entrances on other sides of the building, none of which serve as a formal main entrance to the building. The building therefore does not really have a facade; the description of the building exterior below begins with the south wing and finishes with the larger north wing. None of the exterior walls are referred to as the facade.

The south wing of the building is one story tall and has a low roofline compared to the taller north wing. A connector structure links the Therapeutic Exercise Building to the nearby Special Services Building to the south, located on the eastern side of the south wall of the south wing. The portion of the south wall that is west of the connector features three window openings, with each opening containing two one-over-one metal replacement windows. This portion of the wall also has a flat metal door. The portion of the wall east of the connector has one one-over-one metal replacement window.

The west wall of the south wing has two small metal replacement windows. The east wall of this wing includes six small metal replacement windows. A one-story appendage extends from the east side of the south wing and runs along the south wall of the north wing; this appendage features four small metal replacement windows.

The north wing of the building includes a taller east portion that accommodates the gymnasium space, and a west portion with a somewhat lower roofline, that accommodates the facility's swimming pool. The east wall of the north wing has yellow brick, brick pilasters, a shallow metal-clad overhang, and no doors or windows. The west wall has yellow brick walls, pilasters, a metal-clad overhang, and features a three-sided brick bay with three metal replacement windows. Of the three windows, the center window has fifteen panes, and the side windows each have ten panes. This wall also features two sets of flat steel double doors; each set of double doors has a single-light transom above. Both sets of doors are sheltered by a flat-roof porch, each of which has brick walls with a punched-out design of three squares in each wall.

Like the south wall of the building, the north wall has a taller east section associated with the gymnasium, and a shorter west portion near the swimming pool. The east portion of the wall has yellow brick, brick pilasters, a metal-clad overhang, and six replacement metal awning windows that provide light to the gymnasium space. This wall also has two glass and aluminum doors, each of which has a porch with brick walls pierced with three square openings, and capped with a concrete roof slab. The west portion of the wall has yellow brick cladding, brick pilasters, a metal-clad overhang, and three large metal replacement windows.

The interior floor plan and finishes are highly intact. The main gymnasium space is set up as a basketball court, although it now contains workout machinery, and has maple floors, red brick walls, and a ceiling composed of exposed steel trusses and wood. The lighting fixtures are small ceiling-mounted incandescent lamps. Basketball goals are mounted on the east and west walls, and the maple flooring is striped and painted as a full-size basketball court.

The swimming pool space has red brick walls and a roof composed of a large number of shallow steel trusses, with a metal paneled ceiling above the trusses. The floor and pool basin are made of poured concrete. The office spaces have gypsum board walls and acoustical drop ceilings.

History:

The Therapeutic Exercise 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 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 Therapeutic Exercise 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

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.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 557-559.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 555-564.

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 may have been viewed as less essential. The Hahn schematic shows a theater and also 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 Hahn schematic also shows a combination pool and gymnasium building, which were added to Jefferson Barracks in 1957, when the Therapeutic Exercise Building was completed. The construction of this building represents Haun's emphasis on activities like exercise to instill positive feelings in the patients of the hospital.⁷

The Therapeutic Exercise Building was designed by Maguolo and Quick, Architects and Engineers, of St. Louis, in 1955. 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

The original layout of the Therapeutic Exercise Building was fairly simple. Patients accessed the building from the south via a connecting corridor. The main space was a large exercise area about 100'0" x 78'0" with wood floors and basketball goals. The space was large enough to accommodate a full-size basketball court, but as a large open space, it could also be used for many other recreational activities. The second major facility in the building was a 35'0" x 60'0" swimming pool, which was located in a separate room that sat west of the main exercise room. The pool room also had a three-sided bay window that contained several rows of wood seats. Also included in the facility was a locker room complex for the patients, with an issue room for storing items like uniforms, a dressing room and toilet, and a smaller locker room and toilet facility for the staff. On the south side of the main exercise area were three small rooms: an office, a small storage room, and a small supply room.⁹

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.

⁹ Maguolo and Quick, Architects and Engineers, *Construction Drawings for Additions and Alterations, Veterans Administration, Jefferson Barracks, Mo., Therapeutic Exercise Building*, 1955, on file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

In a 1958 article, a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporter characterized the campus of the Jefferson Barracks VA Hospital as a 185-bed facility with a pleasant tree-lined campus, where patients were busy with therapeutic activities that would help them recover and return to normal life. The article also emphasized that patients wore their own clothing instead of hospital uniforms and lived in small wards instead of large dormitories. The influence of Dr. Paul Haun was showcased in the article, and the text repeated verbatim many of the statements about mental treatment that were included in Haun and Lebensohn's 1948 article. The 1958 article also mentioned recreational activities that were important aspects of the hospital's treatment program and would have taken place in the Therapeutic Exercise Building, such as swimming and participating in basketball and other team sports.¹⁰ Dr. Lester Drubin, the Jefferson Barracks VA Hospital director, emphasized 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 discharge¹¹

Today, the Therapeutic Exercise Building has changed little and continues to be used for its original purpose. All windows were replaced throughout the building in 1982 as part of a multi-building window replacement project on the campus.¹² The main exercise room now features stationary weight machines, treadmills, and other exercise equipment, and does not appear to be used as a court for full competitive basketball. The pool is also still in place and is actively used by patients. However, the building is scheduled for demolition in the coming years as part of a project to build new facilities at the medical center and transfer some of the medical center lands to the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery to expand the burial grounds there.

¹⁰ Mary Kimbrough, "Rehabilitation Is Goal at Barracks Hospital," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 6, 1958.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

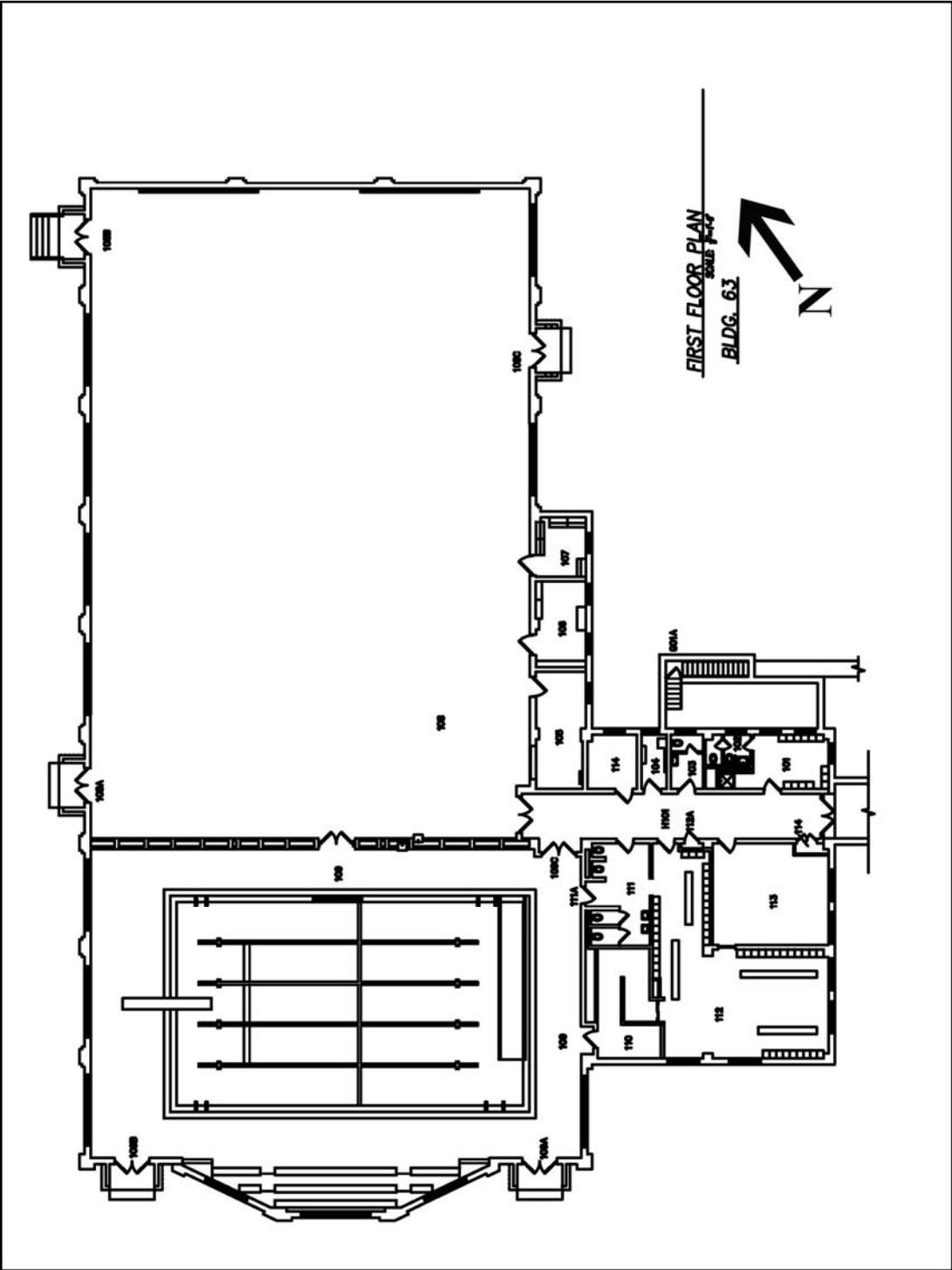
¹² U.S. Veterans Administration, Construction drawing files for Building 61, St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, 1950-2010, on file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

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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- Maisel, Albert Q. "Bedlam 1946: Most of U.S. Mental Hospitals Are a Shame and a Disgrace." *Life*, May 6, 1946.
- Marks, Larry, 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, Jefferson City.
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Therapeutic Exercise Building (Building 63), floor plan for first floor