

U.S. Allegheny Arsenal  
Pittsburgh  
Allegheny County  
Pennsylvania

HABS PA 8-1

HABS  
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2 - PITBU,  
6 -

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
District No. 8

Historic American Buildings Survey  
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815 Bessemer Bldg., Pittsburgh, Pa.

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The United States Allegheny Arsenal  
Forthieth, Butler, Thirty-Ninth & Penn Ave.  
Pittsburgh, Penna  
Allegheny County  
HABS 8-1

The main number 8-1 has been subdivided as follows:

8-1	Group Plan & Plaques	8-1-F	Armory
8-1-A	Commandant's Quarters	8-1-G	Boiler House
8-1-B	Officers' Quarters	8-1-H	Machine Shop
8-1-C	Barracks Building	8-1-J	Entrance Gates
8-1-D	N.C.O. Quarters	8-1-K	Guard House
8-1-E	Storehouse	8-1-L	Carriage Shop

The property on which the arsenal stands was bought by Colonel William Foster from a Mr. Hall on April 4 1814. It was sold by Col. Foster to the Government on April 9 1814 for \$12,000.00, thirty acres in all.

The book, "Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies" by Fiske Kimball, reproduces on page 221 an illustration made from an original study by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, the architect, for the Commandant's Quarters. Mr. Kimball states that the original drawings are in the Library of Congress. [Upon inquiry, Mr. Holland replies that there are no drawings of the arsenal in the Library of Congress and referred the writer to the Bureau of Ordinance, where such drawings are filed.] No further investigation was made.

Work on the Arsenal was begun in 1814. A village of cabins was built for workmen, this settlement developing later into the modern district known as Lawrenceville. The first group of buildings and the stone wall with its gates, which entirely surround the two parts of the property was completed in 1820. Later additions were made up to 1868. The arsenal served during the Civil War and was an active post up to 1926, when it was sold at public auction. Heinz acquired the Northern half and the Southern half was given to the city of Pittsburgh as a recreational area. This latter portion contained stables and powder magazines. The stone powder house was measured and drawn by the Western Pennsylvania Architectural Survey.

The Northern half, north of Butler street, contained buildings arranged in a square; there was a storehouse, three stories high, with a tower 120 feet high, constituting the main arsenal or magazine of arms and in this part there were erected officers' quarters, the barracks, the armory and various shops and offices.

The Arsenal manufactured gun carriages, armory, horse and infantry equipment and ammunition, but no cannon. One of the first steam engines in the United States was installed here in 1828 at a cost of \$12,000.00

<sup>1</sup> These drawings are on file at Library of Congress. Little resemblance is seen between Latrobe's drawings and the present buildings.  
(Note by H.C.F., 1936)

In modern times, since the sale to private hands, the Northern portion has been extensively built over with warehouses, railroad spurs, etc., and some of the old buildings have been regised for other uses. There have been extensive alterations, the old sash removed, stairs altered, and in some cases portions of buildings demolished when the new Fortieth Street bridge was built.

The roofs of the original buildings were covered with copper. They were kept brightly burnished by the prisoners, so it is said. None of these roofs remain, or, if they do, are now covered with slate. Most of the chimney terminations have been re-built.

In 1828, a procession of honor for LaFayette halted at the Arsenal gate; he was given the national salute of 24 guns, one for each state in the Union, after which Major Churchill, the commandant, entertained him at breakfast.

The buildings are severe in line and with little or no embellishment. The commandant's quarters and its symmetrical twin opposite, the officers' quarters, are built of stone. This stone is scored in an interesting way. The original porch has been removed on the commandant's quarters and a later one added on two sides of the building. The stone has been painted red, obscuring the beauty of the original color and texture. The sash have mostly been removed but as several of the original ones remain they have served as a guide for supplying the missing muntins on the drawings. The shutters have also been taken away. The brick portions were added later.

The barracks building is of particular interest, simple and ingenious in plan and with some very charming detail. The old stairway and the second floor mantels are particularly pleasing. Attention is called to the oval shaped plaster ceiling in the N.C.O quarters. (Non-commissioned officers).

The Storehouse is an interesting building with a large windlass built in the roof space to hoist articles of weight to the second floor. The roof is supported with a wooden truss with friction joints.

The armory is an extremely simple stone structure with a beautifully laid ashlar wall.

The stone wall which surrounds the property is very attractive and the gates well designed. The guard house on Butler Street is evidently of a later date and inferior in design, but it has always struck the popular fancy and is usually featured in any publicity given the Arsenal. A move is on foot to preserve it permanently.

Approved .....

*Charles M. Stotz*

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*Reviewed by Henry C. Forman*  
1936