

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
POST CHAPEL

HABS No. TX-3339-M

(Building Number 7151)
Sternberg Street
El Paso
El Paso County
Texas

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Southwest System Support Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 728
Santa Fe, NM 87504

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

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- Location: Sternberg Street, Fort Bliss, William Beaumont Army Medical Center, El Paso, El Paso County, Texas. The property is bounded by Fred Wilson Road to the north, Dyer Street to the east, Hayes Avenue to the south, and Alabama Street to the west.
- Present Owner: United States Army
- Original Use: Post Chapel
- Present Use: Inactive
- Significance: This building is deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under Criterion A and C as a contributing element to the proposed William Beaumont General Hospital Historic District (WBGHHD). This district encompasses the permanent and semi-permanent buildings constructed in the WBGH area at Fort Bliss between 1921 and 1945. These buildings contribute to the understanding of the hospital's role of providing medical service to thousands of American soldiers and their dependents during periods of both war and peace. The original wards no longer exist; however, the remaining buildings in the proposed WBGHHD depict the administrative, social and recreational environment of the hospital during the period of significance. Even though the period of construction of the buildings within the proposed WBGHHD spans over twenty years, they form a cohesive environment based on architectural styles, construction materials, and geographic proximity. Furthermore, this building meets NRHP criteria in that it possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Original Construction Date: 1943
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: United States Army
4. Builders, Contractors and Suppliers: Unknown
5. Original Plans and Construction: The building essentially retains its original exterior appearance and building footprint. The chapel was originally constructed for public use for the William Beaumont Army Medical Center. The chapel's original steeple and some figuratively painted, cathedral stained glass windows remain intact.
6. Alterations and Additions: The exterior configuration still conveys the original shape and character of the building. The interior of the Chapel was renovated in 1989 to serve as Administration/General Purpose office space. The interior has been renovated again and the equipment associated with the previous building use has been removed. Today, the building clearly retains much of the original ornamentation and woodwork. A small rectangular lean-to addition on the northeast side is constructed with a shed roof, two wood panel doors, and a small double-hung eight-over-eight-light window.

B. Historical Context:

William Beaumont General Hospital was one of the U.S. Army's five original general hospitals. It opened at Fort Bliss on July 1, 1921 although the facility was not fully completed until the following year. The hospital originally consisted of forty-eight tile and stucco buildings with a bed capacity of approximately 414. The staff consisted of six officers, two nurses, and thirty enlisted men. William Beaumont General Hospital's original mission was to provide general medical care to border patrol troops stationed at Fort Bliss. By the 1930s, however, the hospital was serving the entire western portion of the Army's Eighth Corps area, providing health care to soldiers stationed at posts in Arizona, New Mexico, and western Texas.

When Congress authorized a limited peacetime mobilization just prior to the nation's entry into World War II, the Army initiated a major expansion program at William Beaumont General Hospital to increase its ability to handle the medical needs of the greatly expanding Army. During the World War II era, the hospital received new wards,

instructional buildings, quarters, storehouses, repair shops, and recreational facilities. This new construction pushed the total number of buildings at the hospital to 174 and the number of available beds to nearly 6000. During the war, the William Beaumont General Hospital trained approximately 16,000 medical technicians, including over a thousand WAC recruits. The hospital also became a specialty center for plastic surgery, ophthalmic surgery, neuropsychiatry, and deep radiation therapy. In the last year of the war alone, some 26,358 patients received medical treatment at the hospital.

William Beaumont General Hospital was one of only ten, of the Army's sixty-three, general hospitals retained after World War II. Besides providing medical care to returning wounded soldiers during the conflicts in both Korea and Viet Nam, the hospital also provided general medicine and surgical services to veterans and personnel at Fort Bliss and other regional military installations. By the mid-1960s, the needs of the Army began to surpass the capabilities of the hospital. Consequently, the Army constructed a new, modern, twelve story facility to the west of the hospital. The new facility, known as the William Beaumont Army Medical Center, opened in 1972 and became the Southwest's major regional Army medical center.

Building 7151 is one of the numerous buildings constructed at the William Beaumont General Hospital during World War II. Constructed in 1943, this building served as the hospital's post chapel. The original cost for construction was \$14,500.00.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The building's architecture is based on a standard WWII chapel building plan. In lieu of the standard wood frame for this building type, the building is constructed with stuccoed hollow clay tiles. Given this finish, the Chapel fits in well with the exterior of the other buildings, displaying more of a Spanish Colonial style.
2. Condition of Fabric: The exterior of the building is in good condition. The interior has retained its original character with a large nave space with open wood timber trusses. Overall, the fabric has been preserved.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: The chapel is 96'-6" in length and 37'-4" in width. It has a height of 16'-6" from the finished floor to the bottom of the trusses in the nave, and 8' dropped ceiling heights in the other rooms. The floor area is approximately 3,415 square feet.
2. Foundations: The foundation is a poured-in-place concrete perimeter stem wall with footings. Subfloor framing and intermediate wood girders are supported on masonry post on concrete footings.
3. Walls: Exterior walls are constructed of stuccoed hollow clay tiles.
4. Structural System: The structure is an 8" load bearing hollow clay tile wall system on a concrete foundation. The roof structure is a heavy wood timber truss system.
5. Porches, Exterior Stairs: Wood bridge, with 2x, 3x and 6x members, extends over a wide rock lined culvert and leads to narthex.
6. Chimneys: None
7. Openings:
 - a. Doors: The primary entrance consists of aluminum storefront double doors and a transom, with glazing and panic hardware. The door opening into the mechanical room is a five-panel wood door. The other door which exits at the rear of the chapel is also a five-panel wood door.
 - b. Windows: Six-over-six-light or eight-over-eight-light double-hung wood windows are used throughout the chapel. The chapel's nave has sixteen-over-sixteen-light double-hung wood windows. The lights in the lower sash are painted "stained" glass. Colors include yellow, blue, white and purple with a centered New Testament scene within the fixed pane.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, Materials: The main roof is a steep gable with louvers, and flush gable ends. It is a heavy wood timber truss, with wood sheathing, and composition shingles. The addition (a mechanical room) has a shed roof with wood rafters, wood sheathing, and asphalt shingles.
 - b. Dormers, Vents: A vent stack projects above the shed roof on the addition, and terminates above the chapel's roof.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor Plans: The main entrance to the building is on the southwest facade in a projecting gabled vestibule (projecting approximately 2'). The first floor of the chapel is mostly an open nave. Off of the vestibule is the cloak room, with a consultation room at the south end. North of (behind) the sanctuary are closets, chapels, a restroom, and mechanical room. A second story choir loft is directly above the southwest vestibule and adjacent rooms.
2. Stairways: One staircase is located at the west corner of the chapel leading from the vestibule area to the balcony level. It is of wood construction, and is covered with carpeting. It begins along the southwest wall. A landing is positioned at the midpoint in the corner. The remaining treads follow the wall perpendicular to the southwest wall. Stair rails are stud construction finished with plaster and a wood top rail, rising three feet high.
3. Flooring: The flooring in the nave and the rooms at the northeast end of the chapel are finished with vinyl tiles. The entrance vestibule is finished with exposed hard wood flooring. The other rooms at the southwest end and the balcony are finished with blue carpeting.
4. Wall Finishes: The exterior wall finish is painted stucco. Typically the interior wall finishes are painted plaster or gypsum with a 4 inch stained wood base. The interior wall finishes for the nave and vestibule are painted plaster with a 42" stained vertical board wainscot.
5. Ceiling Finishes: The ceiling in the nave has exposed heavy timber trusses which expose the plaster finish on the underside of the roof. Plaster or gypsum ceiling finishes are found in all other rooms, with the exception of the consultation room where painted hard board has been used.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doors: The interior doors are single, five-panel, wood-stained doors. There are doors for each room and flanking the sides of the sanctuary. Double doors are positioned between the vestibule and the nave. These include a single light in the space of one panel.
 - b. Windows: The interior finish on the windows is stained wood. Colored glass has been used in all the sanctuary windows and include yellow, blue, white and purple. The lower sashes depicts scenes from the New Testament.

7. Decorative Features and Trim: Decorative features include the detailing of the exposed wood trusses in the nave, and the simple stained wood finishing of the paneling, doors and windows with their surrounds, and the cabinets behind the sanctuary.
 8. Hardware: Most of the doors and windows maintain their original handles and latches. The cabinets behind the sanctuary retain their original latches. The main entrance door is a replacement and does not include original hardware.
 9. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning: Original wood louvered vents are on the steeple. Two swamp coolers (mechanical system) have been added to the rear of the building.
 - b. Lighting: Original, hexagonal cylinder shaped, ornamented metal with stained glass hanging light fixtures are in the nave of the chapel. Flush-mounted and suspended fluorescent lights are located throughout the rest of the chapel rooms.
 - c. Plumbing Fixtures: The bathroom contains exposed piping to the facilities.
 10. Original Furnishings: The altar platform remains, along with built-in cabinets behind the altar. The original pews have been removed.
- D. Site:
1. General Setting and Orientation: The post chapel has been incorporated into the site of the William Beaumont Army Medical Center in El Paso, Texas (Figure 1). The front of the building faces southwest toward the stream. Sternberg Street runs along the northwest side of the building.
 2. Historic Landscape Design: The historic landscape of William Beaumont General Hospital was renowned for its beautiful array of shade trees, shrubs, lush lawns and flower gardens. Between the grounds inception in 1920-1921 and the gradual reduction of maintained acreage in the 1950s, the landscape was referred to as the “paradise in the desert.” Gardner William Reeves was most likely in charge of any planting plan or landscape design that may have governed the layout of the grounds. Today, only scattered residual vegetation and landscape features remain, and most of these have been installed since the period of significance. Currently, although there are assorted trees and shrubs along the eastern side of Building 7151, these have been installed since the period of significance, and it is unknown whether their appearance resembles the historic setting. The remaining landscape is composed of lawn and paved areas.

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
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 (Building Number 7151)
 HABS No. TX-3339-M
 (Page 7)

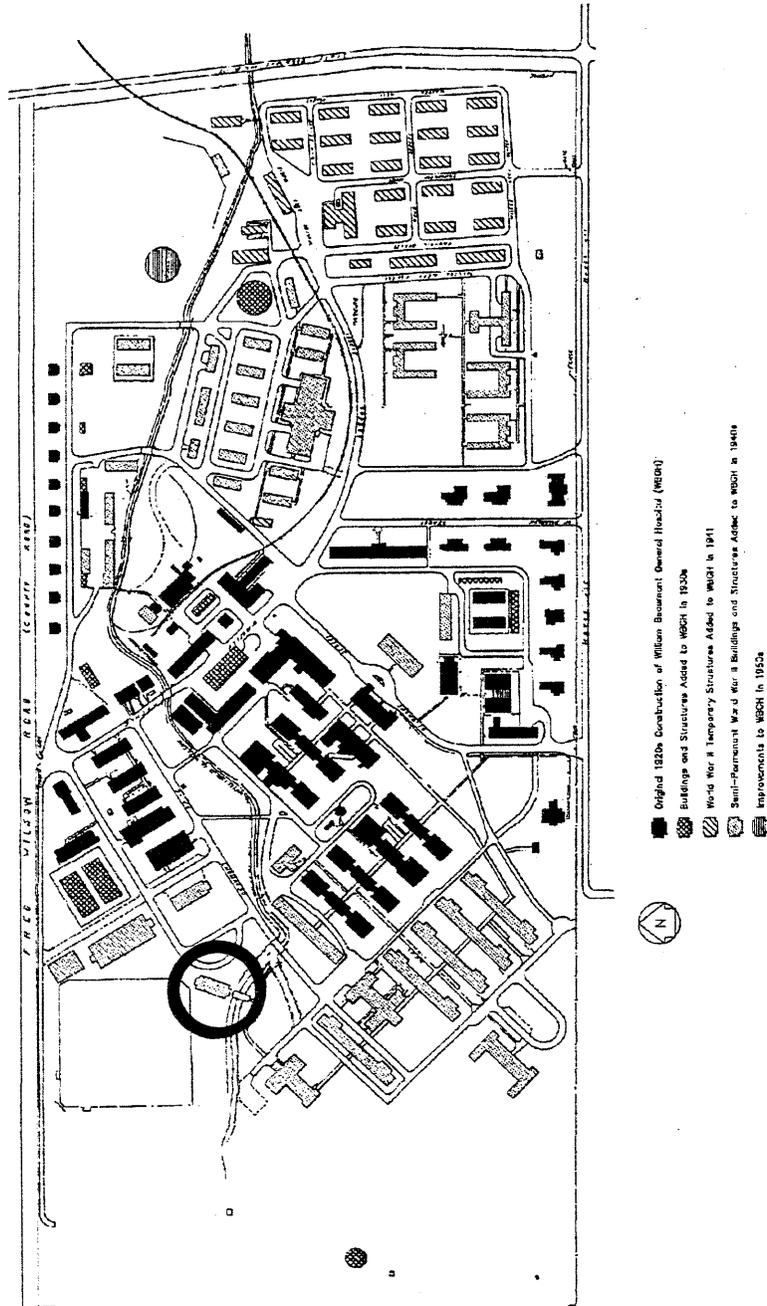


Figure 1: Building Location Map

3. Outbuildings: None

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- A. Architectural Drawings: The large format archival architectural drawings were found on file at the Offices of the Directorate of Public Works and Logistics and the Directorate of Environment, Historic Preservation Team, Fort Bliss, Texas. Drawing numbers for the original construction drawings, dated January 1943, are drawing numbers 700-3601, 700-3603, 700-3604, 700-3600, 700-3606, and 700-3605. These include plans, elevations, sections, and details. Additional drawings include one sheet showing additions and replacements that took place which is undated and titled renovation, and a heating schedule for the building with the drawing number 800-559.
- B. Early Views: A collection of historic photographs is housed in the Office of the Directorate of Environment, Historic Preservation Team, Fort Bliss, Texas.
- C. Interviews: None
- D. Bibliography:
- Fort Bliss Real Property Management Office - Office of the Quartermaster General Records
- Fort Bliss IFSM Data August 1994
- Fort Bliss Facility List
- Map of Post Area - William Beaumont General Hospital, July 1945
- Texas Historic Sites Inventory Form - Texas Historic Commission, July 7, 1989
- E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: None
- F. Supplemental Material: None

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HABS No. TX-3339-M
(Page 9)

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

The project was sponsored by the Office of the Directorate of Public Works and Logistics, Fort Bliss, Texas. Documentation was coordinated through Ms. Vicki Hamilton, Architect, Office of the Directorate of Environment, Historic Preservation Team, Fort Bliss, Texas. The project was completed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers Construction Engineering Research Laboratories (USACERL). The project was completed at the USACERL Cultural Resources Research Center. Ms. Sheila Ellsworth served as project architect. The project researchers were Mr. Patrick Nowlan, Dr. Susan Enscoe, and Ms. Amy Lamb. Mr. Martin Stupich produced the large format photographs included in the report.