

Fort Sam Houston, Branch Commissary
(Fort Sam Houston, Building No. 252)
Northeast of the Intersection of
Liscum Road and Road S-4
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3303-21

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Intermountain Region
National Park Service
P.O. Box 728
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87504

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Fort Sam Houston, Branch Commissary
(Fort Sam Houston, Building No. 252)

HABS No. TX-3303-21

Location: Building 252 is located at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, northeast of the intersection of Liscum Road and Road S-4.

Quadrangle: San Antonio East, Texas Quadrangle 7.5'

UTM: 14.552000.3257660

Date of Construction: 1939

Architect/
designer: Quartermaster Corps

Builder: Unknown

Present Owner: U.S. Army, Fort Sam Houston, Texas 78234

Present Use: Vacant

Statement of Significance: Building 252, completed in 1939, is significant as a part of the development of Fort Sam Houston as a military center and as an expression of regional architecture. Built to serve as a branch exchange and constructed by Works Progress Administration labor, Building 252's Mission Revival style was a response to requests by local architects such as Atlee B. Ayres that Fort Sam Houston's further development consider San Antonio's regional Spanish architectural tradition.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

Building 252, constructed in 1939, was designed by the Quartermaster Corps as a branch exchange for Fort Sam Houston. The building was constructed by the army and was owned by the War Department, which became the Department of Defense. Original builders, contractors, or suppliers are unknown. Original drawings are on file at Fort Sam Houston. Building 252 has experienced minor alterations including replacement of original doors, exterior painting, and interior mechanical and electrical modifications.

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B. Historical Context:

Building 252, a branch exchange, was constructed at the end of a decade that was marked by the first major permanent building program at Fort Sam Houston since the period 1900-10. An early program began in the late 1920s and lasted for approximately five years. A second phase, of which Building 252 was a part, occurred in the 1930s when it became desirable to alleviate a growing public unemployment problem as the world moved slowly towards renewed international hostilities. At Fort Sam Houston, this period of construction was characterized by buildings designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival and other regional styles.

By the end of 1925, it had become apparent to Congress that something would have to be done to fund new permanent construction on military bases. In the opening weeks of 1926, the national press maintained steady pressure on Congress to fund a new construction program, and within a short time, an Army Appropriations Bill passed both houses. With San Antonio assured of a major building effort at Fort Sam Houston, local architect Atlee B. Ayres became a vocal spokesman. He planned and implemented a well-orchestrated effort to influence the design of the new buildings slated for construction at Fort Sam Houston, pressuring Quarter Master General B. F. Cheatham to use "the Spanish type of Architecture." Elements Ayres found particularly attractive included arches, walls of a light cream-colored stucco, and roofs of red variegated tile.¹

Many of the buildings constructed at Fort Sam Houston between 1927 and 1939 consisted of enlisted, noncommissioned officers, and officers' housing. In addition, numerous service/support, warehouse, shop, and similar facilities were constructed, most of them displaying the Mission Revival or "modified Spanish architecture" so favored by local architects. The branch exchange (Building No. 252) completed in 1939 superceded the old exchange located in a

¹Freeman, Martha Doty, *Fort Sam Houston, An American Depot, Headquarters, and Training Facility, 1876-1946*. Fort Worth, Texas: Komatsu/Rangel, Inc., 1994, pp. 103-4.

part of Building No. 133² and helped complete the permanent transformation of what had been an "unsightly" and "rough" post. While the exchange was located in the midst of buildings constructed during the early twentieth century, it displayed the plastered tile walls, tile detailing, and modified Mission Revival style that characterized the most recently erected buildings at Fort Sam Houston.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Description:

Building 252 is a one-story, load-bearing masonry building constructed on a concrete foundation. The exterior walls are constructed of hollow clay tile with stucco on the exterior and plaster on the interior. The walls support wood joists and a built-up, tar-and-gravel roof that is concealed behind a low parapet. Drainage scuppers penetrate the parapets and drain through metal conductor boxes to rectangular downspouts. The U-plan building has wood doors and windows. The doors, which are set in wood frames, include four-panel doors and doors with two lower panels and nine upper divided lights. Windows include metal casement windows with five lights in each sash and three-light metal awning windows. Entrances are protected by small canopies supported by detailed wood knee-braces. Decorative features include a projecting cast-stone coping that sits atop the parapet and diamond-shaped tile medallions set in the stucco just below the line of the parapet top. Window sills are of cast stone. The building has experienced minor alterations that include modifications to existing doors, mechanical and electrical alterations, and the painting of exterior decorative features.

The interior of the building was divided into a kitchen, restaurant, serving room, storage room, and rest rooms. Throughout the building, the floors and bases are cement, the walls are of tile and smooth plaster, and the ceilings are of fiberboard.

²Manguso, John, Pocket Guide to the Cavalry and Light Artillery Post, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Transcript in the collections of the Fort Sam Houston Museum, San Antonio, Texas.

B. Condition:

The building is in fair condition and is vacant.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings: Original drawings, filed by building number, are located in the Fort Sam Houston drawing files.
- B. Early views and site plans: No
- C. Interviews: No interviews were undertaken to complete this form.
- D. Bibliography:
1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Fort Worth, Texas. Federal Records Center. Plans and Drawings,

San Antonio, Texas. Fort Sam Houston, Directorate of Public Works. Plans and Drawings,

Manguso, John. Pocket Guide to the New Post, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Typescript in the collections of the Fort Sam Houston Museum, San Antonio, Texas.
 2. Secondary and published sources:

Freeman, Martha Doty. *Fort Sam Houston, An American Depot, Headquarters, and Training Facility, 1876-1946*. Fort Worth, Texas: Komatsu/Rangel, Inc., 1994.

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of Building 252 was carried out under provisions of a Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement regarding cultural resources at Fort Sam Houston. The work was prepared by Prewitt & Associates, Inc., for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Fort Worth District. Field investigations and documentation was accomplished by Joe C. Freeman, AIA, Architect. Joseph Murphey, architect for the Corps of Engineers, provided large-format photography. Jim Frisch of Jaster Quintanilla and Associates, Inc., and Joe C. Freeman prepared the drawings. Martha Doty Freeman provided historical research. The drawings utilized both

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information from original drawings and field-gathered
documentation.