

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
CENTRAL HEATING PLANT

HABS No. TX-3339-L

(Building Number 7145)

Forwood 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: Forwood 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: Central Heating Plant
- 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: 1921
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: United States Army
4. Builders, Contractors and Suppliers: Unknown
5. Original Plans and Construction: Although additions have been made, the building essentially retains its original character. Much of the original equipment remains in the same location within the interior.
6. Alterations and Additions: The building has had facilities and equipment added and removed over the years. In February 1963, safety controls on the Boiler Plant were installed. In March 1964, brine tanks were added. In April 1979, the roof was replaced. In January 1982, water softeners for the WBAMC Boiler Plant were replaced. In July 1982, the pipe insulation was replaced. Before 1963, the Central Heating Plant was extended to the northwest to accommodate two additional boilers. The old water softener room was removed and a structure was added to the northeast side to serve as new water treatment and a shop rooms.

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,

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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 7145 is one of the original buildings constructed at the William Beaumont General Hospital. Built in 1921, this boiler house served as the central heating plant for the hospital. The original cost for construction was \$83,980.00.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The Central Heating Plant is an utilitarian building. It possesses three gabled parapet walls, gable roofs, shed roofs, and monitors, and one-story additions with nearly flat roofs. Most important to the character of this building is the massive equipment housed within, and how its functionality is seen in the industrial look of the building.
2. Condition of Fabric: The exterior of the building is in fair condition.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: The Central Heating Plant measures 111'-6" x 73'-6". The original boiler room is 54'-4" x 57'-4", with the additional boiler room being 35'-0" x 42'-4". The pump room is 21'-2" x 42'-4". The booster room is 20'-4" x 18'-4". The water

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treatment addition is 48'-6" x 16-2". The main structure has a height of 23'-0" from the finished floor to the bottom of the trusses. The floor area is approximately 6,512 square feet.

2. Foundations: The foundation is a poured-in-place concrete slab with footings.
3. Walls: The building includes two gable-shaped parapet end walls and one intermediate fire wall, which was the original exterior wall before the addition. Walls typically are brick with stucco finish on the exterior and plaster finish on the interior. Since it is at a different elevation from the rest of the building, the booster room in the southeast corner of the building was constructed of poured-in-place reinforced concrete. The water treatment room has exposed brick on the interior.
4. Structural System: The structure is a 14" brick bearing wall system on reinforced concrete footings. The predominant roof structure is steel trussed gable. In the smaller rooms are wood beam construction for their roofs.
5. Porches, Exterior Stairs: Two concrete exterior stairs run between the exterior wall and a concrete and stone retaining wall.
6. Chimneys: Four large metal stacks, of various heights, project through and above the roof. Guy wires are used to stabilize the stacks.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doors: Several doors (single and double metal, and braced frame wood plank) provide access to the building.
 - b. Windows: Large center-pivot nine-over-nine windows are on three of the four sides of the building. A large monitor with louvers is in the main boiler room at the northwest end of the roof. Skylights are in the pump room, and in each of the rooms off to the southwest side of the main boiler room.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, Materials: With the additions the roofs consist either of a gable, flat, or shed roof. They are constructed of either steel trusses or wood beams, and have 2" sheathing, asphalt paper, and asphalt composite shingles.

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b. Dormers, Vents: The building has a large louvered monitor near the southwest end as well as, four gabled wireglass skylights over the small equipment/support rooms.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor Plans: The Central Heating Plant is predominantly rectangular in plan with additions attached to the northwest, northeast, and southeast facades.
2. Stairways: The steps from the pump room extending down to the water treatment room are concrete. The straight stairway descending from the ground level down into the booster room is steel, with slightly detailed handrails. The last six steps are constructed of concrete.
3. Flooring: The flooring is an exposed concrete.
4. Wall Finishes: The interior wall finishes are primarily of stucco which covers the brick wall. In the water treatment room the brick has been left exposed.
5. Ceiling Finishes: There is no finished ceiling. The exposed silver-painted steel trusses and wood purlins leave the underside of the wood beams and bevel-edged wood decking revealed.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doors: Door openings have no doors. The only doors that do exist are those of the rooms off of the main boiler room on the southwest side where the large openings have been filled in with either plywood or steel mesh.
 - b. Windows: Same as exterior. Wood window frames, originally part of the exterior wall (now an interior wall), still exist but the glazing has been removed.
7. Decorative Features and Trim: The decorative feature of the Central Heating Plant is that of the overall interior, and its exposed equipment with interior natural lighting from the windows, monitors, and skylights.
8. Hardware: Most of the doors and windows maintain their original handles and latches. The exterior door hardware has been modified through the years during building maintenance and upkeep.

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9. Mechanical Equipment:

- a. Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning: The building is heated by a byproduct of the as the heat generated activities within. No air conditioning is supplied to the plant itself. The building is ventilated through center pivot windows set high in the exterior walls and by the monitors and skylights.
- b. Lighting: Fluorescent light fixtures hang approximately 15' down from the ceiling.
- c. Plumbing Fixtures: None

10. Original Furnishings: Much of the equipment that still remains in the Central Heating Plant is original, although new equipment was added throughout the years. Existing furnishings include tools, manuals fittings, and parts.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation: The Central Heating Plant 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 northeast toward Forwood Street. The laundry building (Building 2033) is northwest of the Central Heating Plant.
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. Building 7145 is located in the original 1920s construction area, where the landscaping of the hospital grounds was most extensive. Currently, it is surrounded by open paved surfaces and sporadic grasses.
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

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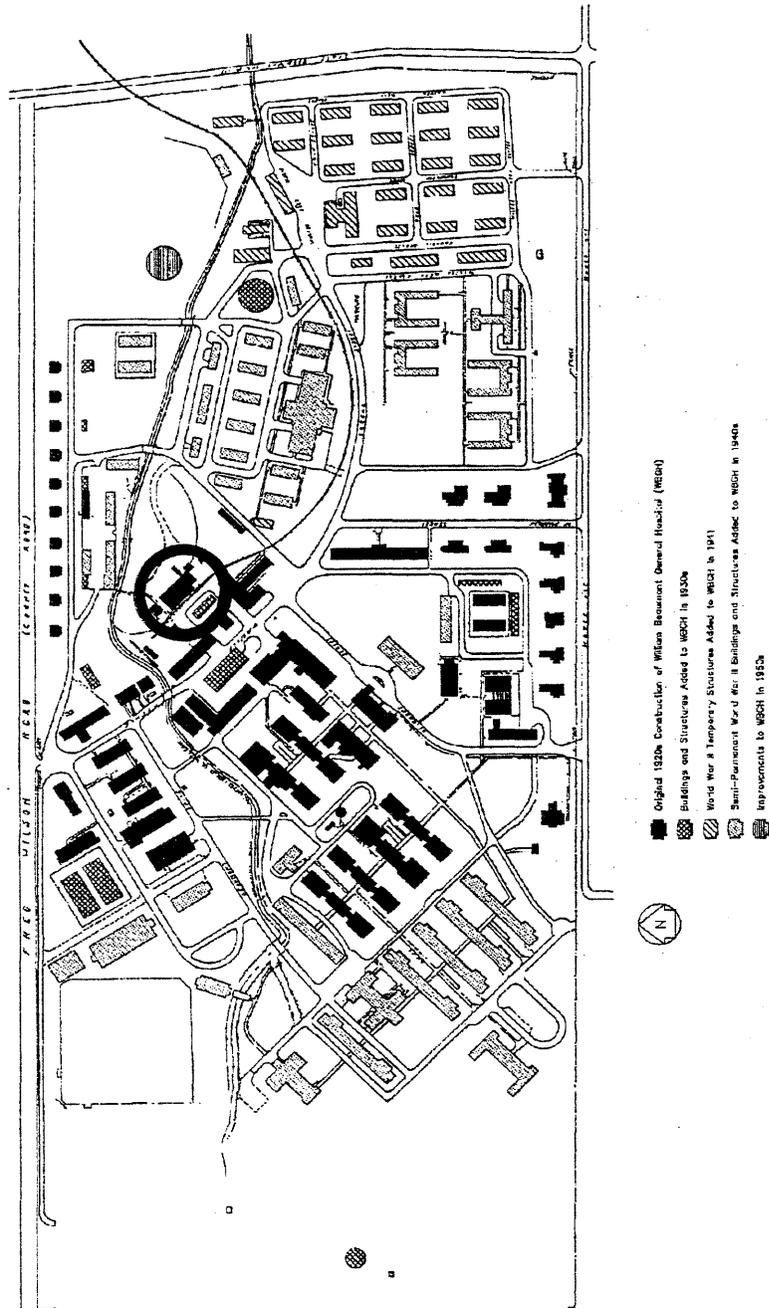


Figure 1: Building Location Map

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Environment, Historic Preservation Team, Fort Bliss, Texas. Drawing numbers for the original construction drawings, dated April 1920, is drawing number 6289-143. Elevations, floor plan, section, and details are on this sheet. Additional drawings showing additions and replacements that took place include those from February 1963 (FB-0011, sheets 2,3,4B of 4), March 1964 (FB-4014, sheet 3 of 3), April 1979 (WB-570, sheet 3 of 9), January 1982 (WB-581, sheet 2 of 2), and July 1982 (WB-584, sheet 3 of 5). A small scale plan of the building was documented on June 4, 1940.

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

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

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Mr. Patrick Nowlan, Dr. Susan Enscoe, and Ms. Amy Lamb. Mr. Martin Stupich produced the large format photographs included in the report.