

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
GYMNASIUM

HABS No. TX-3339-O

(Building Number 7155)
Beaumont Drive
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

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,

GYMNASIUM

(Building Number 7155)

HABS No. TX-3339-O

Location: Beaumont Drive, 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: Gymnasium

Present Use: Gymnasium

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: 1925
2. Architect: Unknown
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: United States Army
4. Builders, Contractors and Suppliers: Unknown
5. Original Plans and Construction: The building retains its original exterior appearance and building footprint. The interior has retained its original design and function.
6. Alterations and Additions: There have not been substantial alterations or additions to the gymnasium, although slight alterations have been made to the interior spaces. These interior alterations include: the proscenium has been enclosed and the stage area converted to a weight room, the room referred to as a bedroom to the left of the stage is now a sauna, the second bedroom near the entrance is now the check room, the original check room serves as an office, and three doorways to the gymnasium from the vestibule have been closed. In addition, emergency exit doors have replaced windows to give egress from the balcony.

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

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
GYMNASIUM
(Building Number 7155)
HABS No. TX-3339-O
(Page 3)

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 7155 is a gymnasium constructed at the William Beaumont General Hospital in 1925. The original cost for construction was \$20,778.98.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The gymnasium is an utilitarian building containing a simplified combination of Spanish Colonial and American Bungalow elements. The Spanish Colonial style is evident in the roof forms and full porches. The American bungalow style is evident in the eave overhangs, exposed rafter ends, and building materials (stucco).
2. Condition of Fabric: The exterior of the building is in good condition. The interior has retained its original character as far as its large open space, upper mezzanine, and finishes.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: The gymnasium is 118'-8" in length and 60'-0" in width. It has a total height of 20'-2" from finished floor to bottom of roof truss. Along the perimeter the first floor has a height of 11'-3" finished floor to ceiling, and the second floor is 7'-10" from finished floor to bottom of roof truss. The floor area is approximately 9,509 square feet.

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
GYMNASIUM
(Building Number 7155)
HABS No. TX-3339-O
(Page 4)

2. Foundations: The foundation is a concrete pier and beam system.
3. Walls: Exterior walls are constructed of 1'-1" stuccoed brick.
4. Structural System: The structure is a 1'-1" load bearing brick wall system on concrete foundation. The roof structure consists of steel trusses.
5. Porches, Exterior Stairs: Wide concrete landing with concrete steps lead up to the three sets of double entry doors on the front facade (southeast elevation). Concrete steps and stoop located at the rear exit, double as a loading dock and are surrounded by a steel railing. Emergency exit stairs are on the northeast side of the building toward the front. The emergency exit stairs on the southwest side of the building toward the rear have been removed and the doors secured. The northeast wood landing remains and is in poor condition.
6. Chimneys: None
7. Openings:
 - a. Doors: The primary entrance consists of three sets of double wood doors with one light each and panic hardware. A single wide metal door with one light is at the rear-off of the stage where the entry has been reduced with concrete masonry units. Emergency exits from the balcony are recently added single metal doors.
 - b. Windows: Steel sash windows are used. On the northeast elevation facing the open gym are 56-light windows with four sets of four-light awning windows. On the southwest elevation facing the dressing rooms are windows with eighteen-lights, and on the second floor are 27-light windows with the six-center-light awning style sash. The front facade includes fifteen-light windows with six-center-light awning style sashes. The rear facade has twelve-light windows with four-light horizontal pivot style sashes.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, Materials: The roof is a gable-on hip with a slight overhang. It is a two way steel truss system. 2 x 6 C-section purlins support the roof's 1" sheathing and gray composition shingles. The interior has been left open exposing the bottom side of the insulation and joists.
 - b. Dormers, Vents: Wood vents within the gable portion of the roof are at both ends of the roof.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor Plans: The gymnasium is rectangular in plan with the main entrance on the southeast facade. It is a two story structure with the gym court open to both levels, and a balcony along the southwest and southeast sides.
2. Stairways: A wide wood stairway along the southeast side leads up to the balcony. Another less prominent set of stairs leads up to the balcony from the stage.
3. Flooring: Maple hardwood, well maintained, is the floor finish for the court area and the balcony is oak. Vinyl tiles are used in the vestibule and balcony walkway, carpet is in the offices, and exposed concrete is used in the dressing room and toilet areas.
4. Wall Finishes: The primary wall finish is painted brick throughout most of the gymnasium. The entry room has plaster-finished walls. The offices have been finished with wood paneling.
5. Ceiling Finishes: The ceiling within the gym area has been left unfinished with the steel truss system exposed. The dressing rooms are wood joists, partly exposed, and part drop acoustical ceiling. The entry room has a plaster finish and the offices have acoustical drop ceilings.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doors: The interior doors are wood panel doors with 1"x4" trim and 1/4 round molding. The door to the check room is a single five-panel dutch door. A two-light transom is located over an opening on the balcony.
 - b. Windows: The interior finish on the steel windows is paint.
7. Decorative Features and Trim: The decorative features is that of the exposed structure and materials. The brick proscenium is flanked by two pilasters with recessed paneled, raised bands, corbelled capitols.
8. Hardware: Many of the doors have been replaced, but the entry double doors still retain their operating hardware, handles, and latches. Most of the latches for the awning windows are still intact.

9. Mechanical Equipment:

- a. Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning: Radiators are throughout the gym area, positioned in the middle of the wall and along the balcony line, appearing almost as a decorative feature. Swamp coolers have been added to the rear of the roof.
- b. Lighting: The fixtures in the gym are industrial, high-intensity discharge light fixtures suspended from the steel rafters. Suspended fluorescent fixtures are on the stage and in the dressing rooms. Ceiling mounted fluorescent fixtures are in the offices. There are a few incandescent bulbs used throughout the building. Two original cast iron ornamental light fixtures with glass casings flank both side of the entrance on the exterior of the building.
- c. Plumbing Fixtures: Exposed plumbing fixtures are throughout the dressing room, including shower room, restrooms, and locker room.

10. Original Furnishings: None

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation: The gymnasium 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 southeast towards Beaumont Drive.
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 7155 is located in the original 1920s construction area, where the landscaping of the hospital grounds was most extensive. Currently, it is surrounded by two shrubs and two trees along the facade, one forlorn tree on the northeast side, open paved surfaces and sporadic grasses.
3. Outbuildings: None

FORT BLISS, WILLIAM BEAUMONT GENERAL HOSPITAL,
 GYMNASIUM
 (Building Number 7155)
 HABS No. TX-3339-O
 (Page 7)

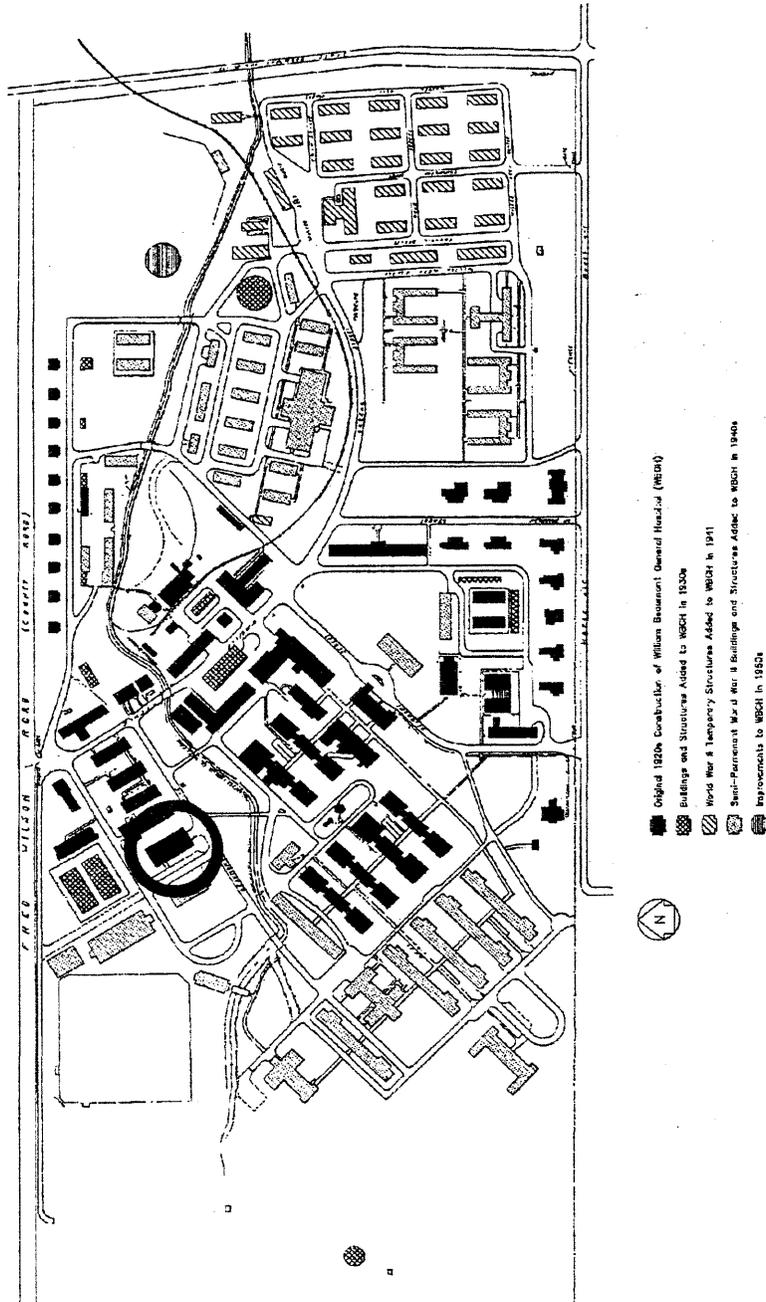


Figure 1: Building Location Map

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

- A. Architectural Drawings: No original large format archival drawings were found on file at Fort Bliss, Texas. Only one small scale record of a floor plan and section were found, which was dated May 7, 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 Mr. Patrick Nowlan, Dr. Susan Enscoe, and Ms. Amy Lamb. Mr. Martin Stupich produced the large format photographs included in the report.