

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Pentagon Barracks or the old United States Barracks at Baton Rouge consists of four two-story buildings with an open space on the fifth side of the pentagon. The four structures are lettered in a counterclockwise direction, with Building A being the one on the southwest Building B on the southeast, Building C on the northeast, and Building D on the north.

All four structures are of brick with 10 large brick Doric pillars supporting two-story galleries on the front and back of each structure. Buildings A and D are 184 feet long and 34 feet wide, with two galleries, each 12 feet wide. Buildings B and C are each 24 feet wide plus the two galleries of 12 feet each.

Building A has a 1st floor sallyport 15 feet wide, and Building C has one 12 feet wide. An 1870 report states that Building D originally had a sallyport that was bricked in.

None of the interiors of the buildings are original as they date from the 1966 restoration. Each building now has two chimneys, but an early photograph shows four on the structure pictured. The original ground level flooring was apparently of flagstone.

The Pentagon Barracks were built in 1819-1823 as a major expansion of the Baton Rouge military post. They were designed by Captain James Gadsden, an engineer with the U. S. Army. Two of the pentagonal group were to be for quartering troops, and two were to provide quarters for officers. The fifth "building" was to be twin structures with a common wall.

The Adjutant-General's office described the barracks as follows: "The works were completed about 1825 . . . The barracks at the post consisted of two ranges of officers quarters; two ranges of brick barracks for soldiers, each range being 180 feet by 36 feet, two stories in height, with a piazza on one side, and intended to accommodate eight companies, with their complement of officers."

When the plans for the post expansion were drawn up there was the threat of invasion by Spanish troops from Texas, as well as the ever present possibility of a slave insurrection. Accordingly, a large diamond-shaped bastion was designed for each angle of the pentagon and the entire area was to be surrounded by a dirt embankment with similar bastions. In addition, the only openings in the four barracks and officers' quarters were the two sally-ports and loopholes for small arms found at each end of the buildings. There were no outside galleries or columns. A treaty with Spain was signed about the same time construction began on the barracks, and as the fifth side of the pentagon was never really completed, the bastions and glacis were never built.

The galleries on the outsides of the structures were added about 10 years after the buildings were completed. The soldiers stationed there complained of the excessive heat without them, and they were apparently added when it was considered safe to allow them.

The twin buildings with the common wall that were to comprise the fifth side of the pentagon were built, but one was torn down the year after construction work began and the other, after unsuccessful attempts to brace it to keep it from leaning toward the river, was gone by 1829.

Assistant Surgeon E. A. Koerper, U. S. Army, made this report in 1870:

"The barracks consist of four two-story brick buildings erected in 1823-24. There was originally a fifth building forming the river side of the pentagon, but this was removed many years ago. The northeast and southeast wings are used as officers' quarters, the dimensions of each being 182 by 24 feet, and a veranda, 12 feet in width, extends the whole length of the building, both front and back. Staircases lead from the outside to both galleries. The north and southwest wings,

occupied by the inlisted (sic) men, are similar to the officers' quarters, except that the dimensions are 184 by 34 feet. The upper stories contain two dormitories, accommodating one company, fitted up with double bunks and allowing 563 cubic feet air space per man. Fireplaces are the means of warming the quarters; the ventilation is ample. Large sinks are built near the river. Two small rooms at each end of the building, and communicating with the dormitories, are used as offices and storerooms. The ground floor contains two kitchens, two mess-rooms, and two storerooms. Each building is adapted for two companies. The northeast and southwest wings have each a sally-port through the center. The sally-port of the north wing has been closed up and is now used as a guard-house. This contains a fireplace and three windows, two in front and one in back, which are the only means of ventilation. One of the store-rooms is used as a cell, which is badly ventilated, unless the door is kept open. . . ."

"The water supply is obtained from cisterns, which are kept clean, and the water is all that can be desired. The grounds about the post are well drained by artificial surface drains, which are daily disinfected with lime and carbolic acid."

In 1957, two 25 foot diameter brick cisterns were uncovered. Each 10 feet deep, they were formed of cement-covered hand-shaped bricks. One was located between A and B buildings, and the other between buildings C and D. The date of their construction is not known, but it is estimated they could each hold 49,000-50,000 gallons. Both cisterns were filled in with dirt as a safety measure.

The buildings were used to house the Louisiana State University cadets after 1886, and then, in 1927 LSU coeds. They were then converted into apartments and some office space. The 1966 renovation work found the brick shells of all four buildings in excellent shape. Today Building A contains eleven one- and two-story apartments, while B, C, and D house state offices.

Statement of Significance

The Baton Rouge area has, at different times, been under the control of the Spanish, French, British, the Republic of West Florida, the State of Louisiana, the Confederacy, and the United States. The Capitols of Spanish West Florida and the Republic of West Florida were located in Baton Rouge.

The British erected a large dirt fort on the present State Capitol grounds in the summer of 1779 only to have it captured after bombardment by a Spanish expedition led by Governor Bernardo de Galvez from New Orleans in September of that same year. Citizens of West Florida revolted in September, 1810, capturing the fort after a small skirmish. Forming the Republic of West Florida, they raised the flag of that nation over the fort but turned the area over to the United States peacefully on December 10, 1810.

The fort served as assembly point for troops going to the Creek War in 1813-1814 and to the Battle of New Orleans in 1814-1815. A major expansion of the post was made in 1819-1823 when new barracks were built and a large Arsenal Depot was established to serve the southwestern United States.

In 1819 Captain James Gadsden, a U. S. Army engineer prepared a plan for a pentagonal group of buildings and a nearby powder magazine to be constructed on 200 arpents of land purchased by the U. S. Government for \$13,500 from Fergus Duplantier. The lower floors of four of the buildings--those remaining today--were designed for use as kitchens, messhalls, storerooms,

offices, and a guardhouse. The upper floors contained enlisted men's barracks and officers' quarters. The fifth building, which was parallel to and on the bank of the river, was in reality two identical buildings end to end. Each was described as follows: "A building 90 feet by 30 feet, two stories high, with a large storehouse or cellar opening into the ditch of the work and situated convenient to the landing place" One of the twin structures was for the use of the Ordnance Department, the other for the use of the Quartermaster and Commissary Departments.

The contractor for the pentagon complex was John Hill, with supervision by Captain Thomas S. Rodgers and, for the small Ordnance structure, Captain R. D. Richardson. Richardson and Rodgers came to Baton Rouge in 1818 and began assembling materials. Hill imported some 100 brickmakers, brickmasons, and carpenters from Ohio, Kentucky, and New England. Actual construction began in June of 1819. Soldiers of the garrison from the 1st U. S. Infantry Regiment were used as laborers for the construction and the cutting of timbers in the nearby swamps. For this they received extra pay of fifteen cents per day plus an extra whisky ration. Richardson's correspondence mentions that some timber came from a place two hundred miles north of Pittsburgh in the Allegheny Mountains.

In September, 1819, a yellow fever epidemic took the lives of 30 of the artisans and 20 of the soldiers. Captain Rodgers, supervisor of the barracks structures, also died, and contractor Hill and about half of the remaining workmen were taken ill. The difficulty in obtaining skilled replacements as well as finding a substitute for Captain Rodgers contributed to the delay in construction. The buildings were not completed until 1824.

Rodgers' successor, Captain John Jones, arrived in Baton Rouge in 1820, and supported by the Board of Survey, had the small Quartermaster's building condemned for having been constructed with inferior materials and workmanship. It was torn down, but apparently never reconstructed. In March of 1827, the small Ordnance building was reported as extremely unsafe, and by 1829 it had been removed.

In 1840, Dr. B. F. Harney, the post surgeon when the Pentagon group was constructed, described the group as follows: "They were originally of pentagonal form but the building forming the side parallel to the river and intended for the Quartermaster and Commissary Departments being of bad workmanship has been removed. This fortunately leaves open the angle next to the river and affords a fine view and better ventilation than if the original plan had been preserved."

After the completion of the construction in 1825, the garrison was placed under the command of Lt. Col. Zachary Taylor, later president of the United States. Taylor finished his third assignment at the post shortly before his election as President of the United States.

The fort remained a United States military post until the State of Louisiana seized it in 1861, turning the operation of the Arsenal complex over to the Confederacy. In 1862 United States troops seized the post and it formed a strong point for the Federal forces engaged in the Battle of Baton Rouge, August 5, 1862, breastworks having been thrown up around the entire present-day Capitol grounds. The Post was subsequently renamed Fort Williams in honor of the Federal commander who had been killed in that battle.

The arsenal complex was transferred from the Ordnance Department to the Quartermaster Department in 1869 for use as garrison barracks. On June 6, 1879, the United States troops were withdrawn from the post under Special Orders No. 86, Department of the South dated May 31, 1879. An ordnance sergeant was left as caretaker.

Garrison records reveal the names of many famous persons who visited the Barracks: Gilbert de Motier, the Marquis de Lafayette in 1824; the first Wade Hampton and General James

Wilkinson, both of the Revolutionary War era; President of the Confederate States of America Jefferson Davis; Ulysses S. Grant before he was President; Abraham Lincoln, sometime between 1828 and 1831; a young Robert E. Lee; famed orators John C. Calhoun and Henry Clay; Generals George Custer and James Longstreet; Generals Nathan Forrest and Stonewall Jackson; and William T. Sherman.

On July 10, 1884, the General Assembly of Louisiana passed the following concurrent resolution:

"Whereas during the late internecine war the troops of the Federal Government did enter, occupy, and use as a contonment the buildings of the Louisiana State University, located in Alexandria, parish of Rapides, Louisiana, thereby destroying the school furniture, philosophical apparatus, and chemical laboratory of said institution; and

Whereas the United States barracks in the city of Baton Rouge is an abandoned military post, with its handsome edifices, magnificent park, and extensive grounds going to waste for want of occupancy; and

Whereas the location of the United States barracks is a most eligible site for the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, accessible to students from every section of this State, by river and rail, affording nearly 300 acres of arable land for the agricultural department, besides ample building accommodations for mechanical workshops, library, cabinets, museum, and apparatus; and

Whereas the building now used for the Louisiana State University was originally intended and set apart as an asylum for the deaf, dumb, and blind of this State; therefore,

Be it resolved. That we, the General Assembly of the State of Louisiana, convened and representing the people thereof, do most respectfully memorialize the Congress of the United States, requesting a donation of the United States barracks at Baton Rouge, with all its buildings, grounds and appurtenances, to the State of Louisiana, to be used for such educational purposes as may be hereafter designated by the general assembly.

Be it further resolved, that the Governor of this State be, and he is hereby, requested to transmit, at his earliest convenience, a copy of the foregoing resolution to the President of the United States, and also the Senate and House of Representatives at Washington."

On the 22nd of August, 1884, the buildings and grounds of the Baton Rouge post were turned over to the Department of the Interior from the Department of War pursuant to act of Congress approved July 5, 1884.

In the Senate report concerning the transfer of the Baton Rouge post to Louisiana State University, it was reported by the Adjutant General's office that they had been informed that "the buildings are all occupied as tenement houses and that the land is being cultivated."

Probably through the influence of General William T. Sherman, its first president or superintendent, the University was able to lease the land from the Federal government in 1886. By Act of Congress in 1902, Louisiana State University was given full title to the grounds. The Pentagon buildings were used as cadet barracks.

Between 1925 and 1932, the University gradually moved to its new campus on the south side of Baton Rouge. When the cadets occupying the barracks were moved, the Pentagon Barracks were remodeled into dorms for the coeds at a cost of \$50,000. Then the buildings became apartments occupied by LSU faculty and other state employees.

On January 11, 1951, full title to all post property was given to the State. Some apartments remained, but Governor Earl K. Long also ordered the buildings used as office space. Some 12 state agencies were housed there by 1966.

In December, 1965, plans were drawn up for renovations and additions to the Pentagon Barracks complex by William J. Hughes, Jr. and Associates, Architects, for the State of Louisiana. Work on the buildings was completed in 1967 at a cost of \$911,000, and the structures are now used for state offices and apartments. The Barracks building numbered "A3" has been converted into 11 apartments. These one and two bedroom apartments are assigned at the discretion of the Governor to various state officials and gubernatorial aides. Buildings B, C, and D house various state agencies.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES .

Casey, Powell A. "It Really Was a Pentagon" Baton Rouge Sunday Advocate, August 6, 1972.

Ordnance Dept. Correspondence file, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

Senate Report No. 1137 to accompany bill H. R. 985, 4th Congress, 1st Session, 1886.