

WATERTOWN ARSENAL, BUILDING NO. 131  
Arsenal Street  
Watertown  
Middlesex County  
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-1009-D

HABS  
MASS  
9-WATO,  
6D-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service

Northeast Region

Philadelphia Support Office

U.S. Custom House

200 Chestnut Street

Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

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WATERTOWN ARSENAL, BUILDING NO. 131

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**Location:** Arsenal Street, Watertown, Middlesex County, Massachusetts  
USGS Boston South, MA Quadrangle  
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinate: 19.286210.4595450

**Present Owner:** U.S. Army Materials Technology Laboratory  
Arsenal Street  
Watertown, Massachusetts 02172

**Present Use:** Administrative Offices

**Significance:** The Administration Building, Building 131, is significant as a fine example of Georgian Colonial Revival style architecture and for its role in the twentieth-century history of Watertown Arsenal. It is a contributing element in the Watertown Arsenal Historic District which is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

**PART I            DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION**

Building 131, the Administration Building, is sited at the historic center of the Watertown Arsenal, facing east across an elliptical drive to Talcott Avenue. The two-story, thirteen-bay, red brick building designed in the Georgian Colonial Revival style ca. 1900 by Charles H. Alden, Jr. was expanded in 1918 (Stone & Webster, engineers) and 1943 (Chester Lindsay Churchill, architect). It now stands as a large rectangular mass with a small central courtyard. The building rises from a coursed, pene-hammered, granite block foundation with raised basement and brick water table, to red brick bearing walls of Flemish bond with glazed headers and with corner quoins. A raking cornice and plain frieze outline the slate hip and gable roof. Windows throughout the ca. 1900 and 1918 section of the building are six-over-six, double-hung wood sash set in brick jack arches with stone keys and limestone slip sills.

The thirteen-bay facade of the original building is flanked by slightly projecting, two-bay end pavilions added in 1918 and anchored at the center by a two-story, projecting, pedimented, entrance frontispiece. Set in a segmental brick arch with a stone key, the entrance surround has an elliptical single-light fanlight, large single sidelights with heavily molded wood panels below, and a heavily molded wood panel door with a single light in the upper half. The leaded fanlight and sidelights of the original entrance have been relocated (1943) to the interior hall door behind the main entrance. The entrance approach consists of a podium of pene-hammered granite steps and buttresses. Surmounting the entrance is a three-part window in a brick jack arch with stone key at the second level and a lunette with tracery and brick round arch with stone key in the gable pediment. Rising from the center of the roof is an octagonal cupola with gold domical roof and louver-filled round-arch arcade on a square balustraded base with classical corner pilasters, modillions, and Roman face clock. This cupola was erected in 1943 replacing the four-sided original which had a balustraded base, a round-arch arcade with classical pilasters, and a copper clad cross-round-arch section with curved roof, Roman face clock, and spire finial. The end pavilions are framed with quoins and cornice returns and lit at the attic level by oculus windows with tracery and four stone keys. Decorative copper downspouts bear Watertown Arsenal insignia of crossed cannon and stack of cannon balls in low relief.

The original building of ca. 1900 comprised the thirteen by five bay core. Elements that were lost in later additions include wood corner pilasters and gable end pediments. Two brick chimneys in the front roof slope that were part of the original design were removed before 1918. Early views of the building show it covered in Boston ivy with awnings on all the windows.

In 1918, in order to gain more office space, the end pavilions and a two-story, thirteen-by-five bay addition at the center of the rear elevation were added. The construction of the end pavilions matched the original construction and probably reused materials. In the rear addition, the brick walls and slate gable roof match the earlier construction and the overall effect is similar, although the foundation is poured concrete, the jack arches have no keys, and the trim material is cast concrete. The west gable end has returns and a louvered oculus with concrete keys. Basement windows on the rear are three-light and six-light hinged wood sash. The center bay of the wing's north elevation once held a door; the ghost of stairs is still visible against the foundation.

In 1943, the building was again substantially enlarged by a thirteen-by-five bay, three-story with raised basement, rear (west) addition south of the 1918 addition, a three-by-four-bay, two story addition at the southeast corner of the building with two, two-bay, two-story connectors to the 1918 south end pavilion and the new rear wing, and a broad, two-story, three-bay connector at the rear between the 1918 and 1943 wings. The south rear addition has six-over-nine double-hung wood sash windows set in jack arches. A molded wood stringcourse runs between the second and third stories, and a narrow molded cornice trims the slate hip roof. The raised entrance is in a central, projecting, gabled pavilion with recessed double-leaf doors and five-light transom, surmounted by a heavy molded frieze and

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cornice. The steps are concrete with brick buttresses. Above the entrance, flushboard paneling surrounds an oculus in the gable pediment.

The west elevation of the slate gable roofed rear cross connector has a prominent central entrance. It is composed of a pedimented projecting pavilion with a massive pedimented overhang shielding recessed and paneled double-leaf doors with paneling and transoms in the recess surrounds. A three-part window in the second level and flushboard paneling and oculus in the gable pediment repeat motifs elsewhere on the building. Original iron and glass lanterns flank the entrance. North of the main entrance a ramp leads down to a double-leaf utility entrance at the basement level below grade. The small connectors near the southeast corner of the building have uneven fenestration with upper windows breaking the cornice line, simple treatment, and wood window sills. The completion of the building programs created a small inner courtyard which contains a subterranean meeting room.

While the exterior of the building is little altered, the interior has undergone numerous changes and little remains of original spatial arrangements or finishes. The interiors are arranged as double loaded corridors with small offices on either side. Only the third floor of the 1943 addition is an open space with no partition walls.

An important component of the 1943 additions was the southeast addition which was designed with a commanding officer's suite on the first floor. Highly intact, it includes a wood-paneled outer office, a large inner office with partially paneled walls, and a broad jack arch opening with modillion cornice leading to paneled doors accessing a conference room, rear hall, and bathroom. Finishes are a combination of oiled wood and paint, as they were originally. The spaces are configured to allow circulation in and out of the office by the rear, and to allow direct access to the subterranean conference room.

## **PART II        HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

The classically inspired Administration Building, the highlight of the 1900 building campaign, cost \$15,000 and shifted the administrative center of the Arsenal away from the historic quadrangle for the first time. This was the most ornate building to have been constructed at the Arsenal since the erection of the Commanding Officer's Quarters, Building 111 (HABS No. MA-1009-F). It was loosely modeled after Philadelphia's Independence Hall, symbolizing the Arsenal's commitment to safe-guarding the nation's freedom and was a form later used in buildings at Picatinny and Frankford Arsenals. The architect, Charles H. Alden, Jr., was based in Boston. As the Arsenal and its need for office space grew, the building doubled in size in 1918 at World War I, and then expanded to triple its original size in 1943 at World War II. It is one of the few buildings within the Arsenal that is still being used for its original purpose.

## **PART III        SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

### **A.        Plans and Drawings**

Army Materials Technology Laboratory, Facilities Engineering, Watertown, Massachusetts.

### **B.        Historic Views**

Army Corps of Engineers, New England Division, Waltham, Massachusetts. Photographs (5 volumes: 1944 to 1970).

Army Materials Technology Laboratory, Library, Watertown, Massachusetts. Foster Notebooks, files, and historic photographs (nineteenth century to 1980s).

Army Materials Technology Laboratory, Photo Lab, Watertown, Massachusetts.

### C. Bibliography

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Baylies, Libby

1982 *Watertown Arsenal (Gun Carriage Manufacturing Complex) Draft National Register of Historic Places Nomination*. Unpublished typescript. Watertown: Army Materials Technology Laboratory, Library.

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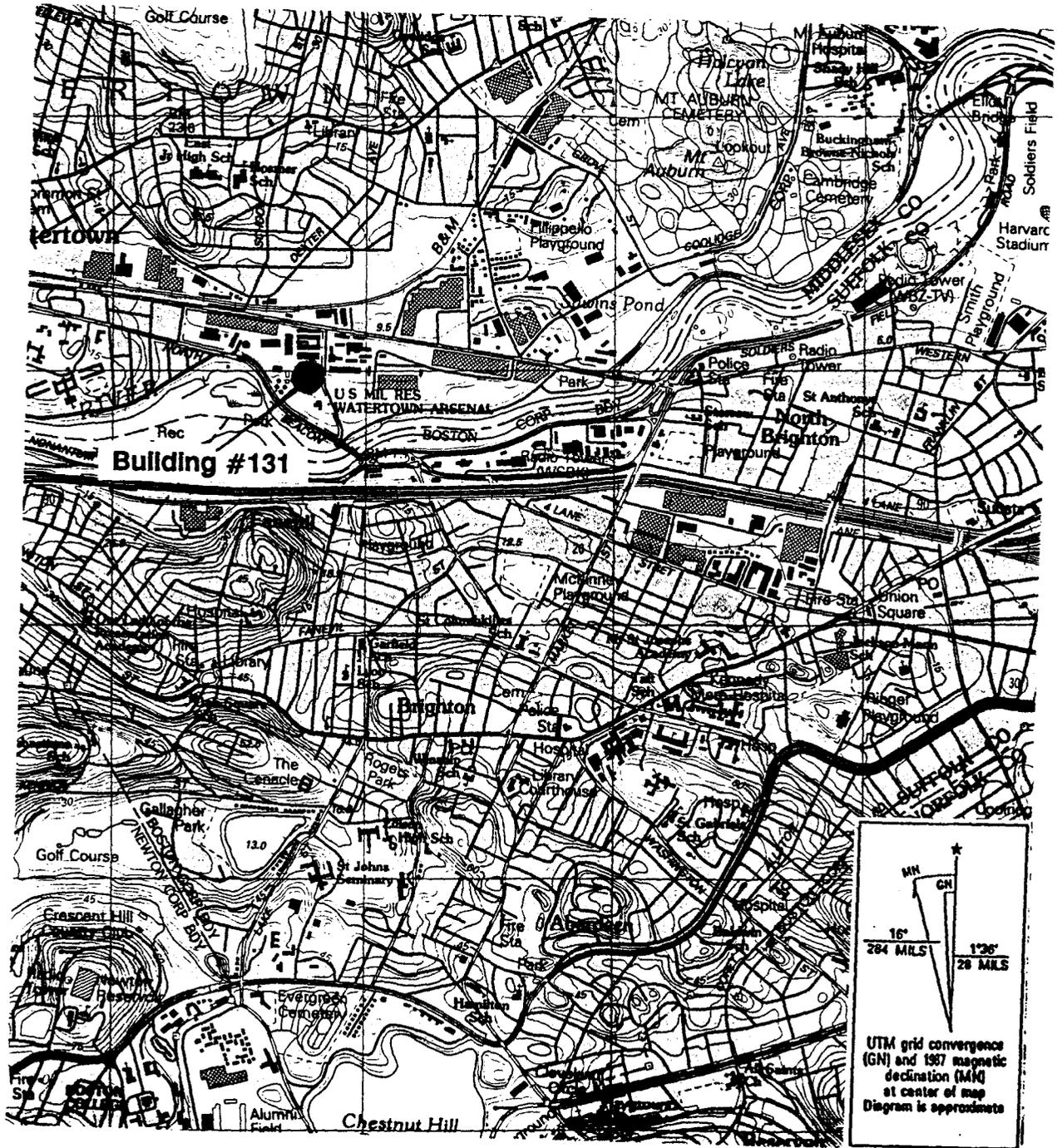
For additional sources, consult Burns and Bahr 1982, previously submitted to the Library of Congress as HABS/HAER documentation for Watertown Arsenal, HAER No. MA-20.

**PART IV      PROJECT INFORMATION**

The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL Inc.) was retained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England Division to prepare HABS and HAER documentation for the Watertown Arsenal. The documentation was conducted in April, May, and June 1995 by the PAL Inc. project team including Virginia H. Adams, Senior Architectural Historian, Catherine Vieth, Assistant Architectural Historian, and Maureen A. Cavanaugh, Preservation Planner. The large format photography was completed in May and June 1995 by Robert Brewster of Warren Jagger Photography, Inc., Providence, Rhode Island.

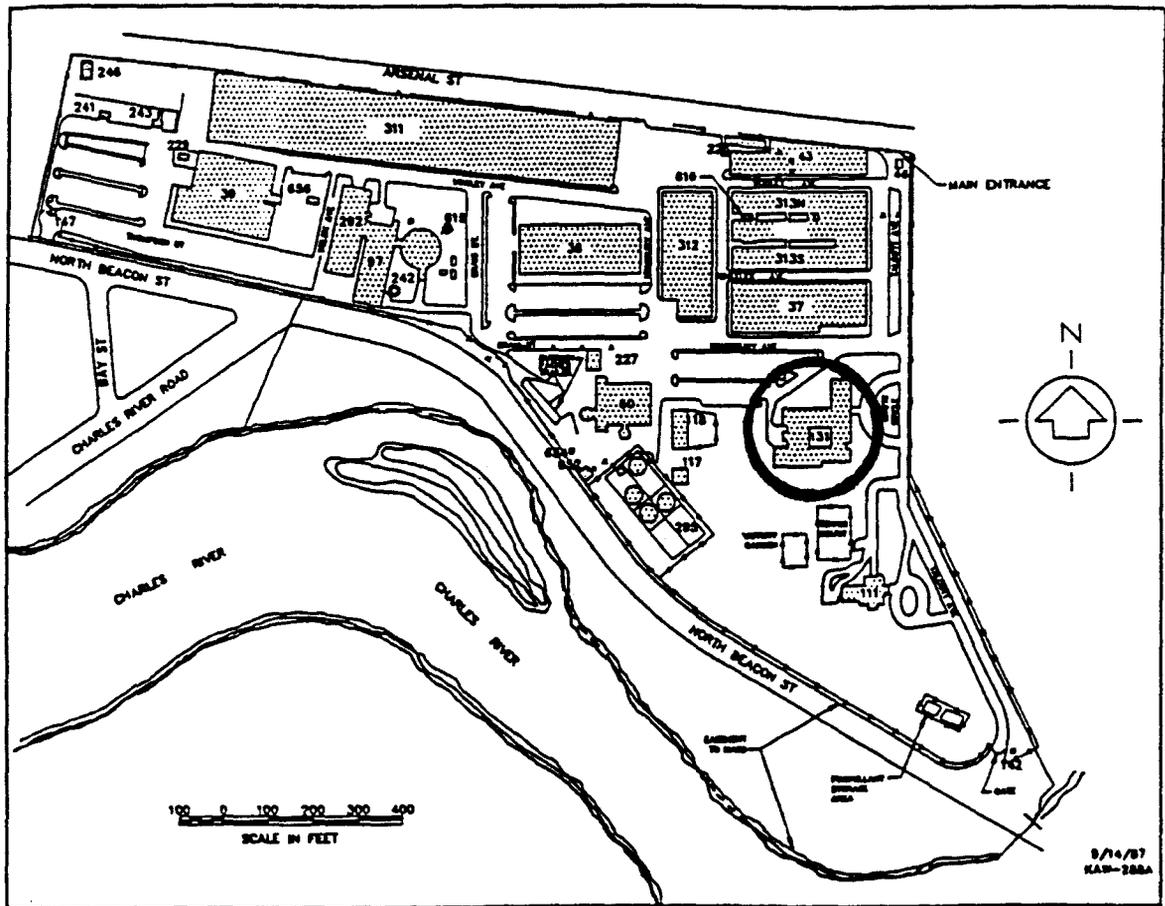
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LOCATION MAP (USGS BOSTON SOUTH, MA)  
Scale: 1:25,000



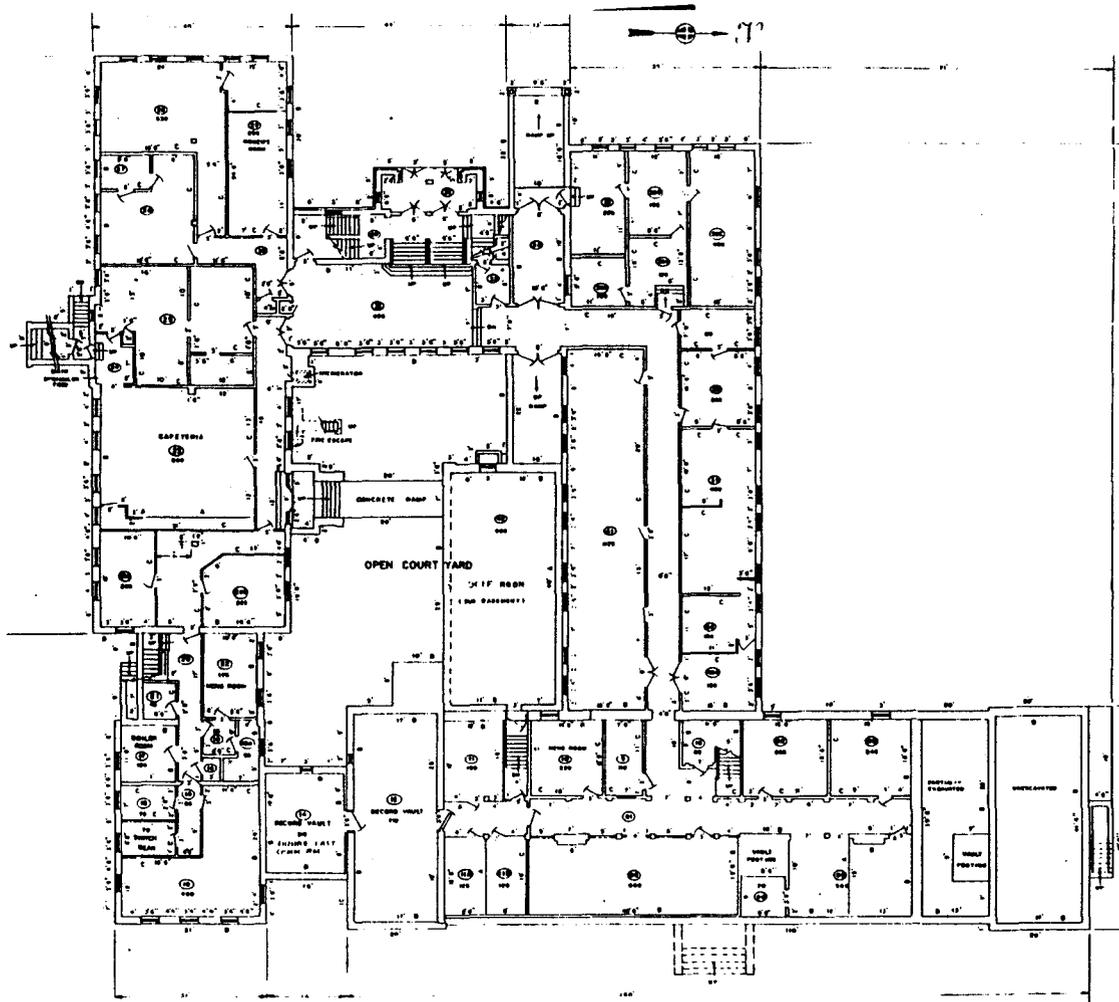
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LOCATION MAP WITHIN WATERTOWN ARSENAL  
(Source: E.G. & G. USATHAMA report, 1988)



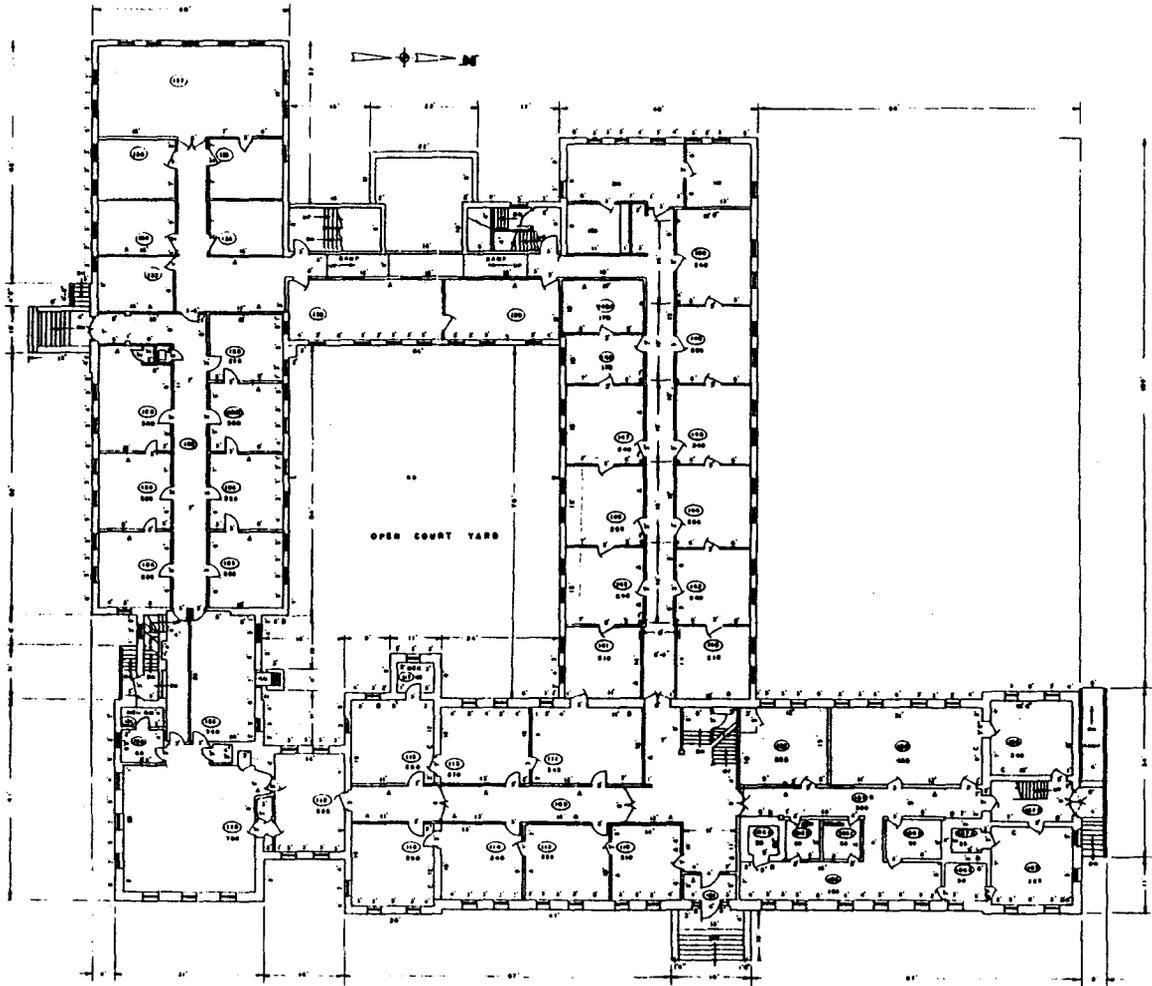
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**BASEMENT PLAN**  
(Source: Drawing P-131-B, AMMRC 1982)



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**FIRST FLOOR PLAN**  
(Source: Drawing P-131-1, AMMRC 1982)



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**SECOND FLOOR PLAN**  
(Source: Drawing P-131-2, AMMRC 1982)

