

Kansas City General Hospital  
2315 Locust  
Kansas City  
Jackson County  
Missouri

HABS No. MO-251

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MO,  
48-KANCI,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey  
National Park Service  
Rocky Mountain Regional Office  
Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, Colorado 80225

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
KANSAS CITY GENERAL HOSPITAL

LOCATION: 2315 Locust, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri  
PRESENT OWNER: City of Kansas City, Missouri  
PRESENT OCCUPANT AND USE: Vacant

SIGNIFICANCE:

Kansas City General Hospital, which opened in 1908, was the City's earliest charitable hospital under Municipal control. A public hospital had been located in other buildings in this general vicinity, before the passage of a bond issue in 1903 for the construction of this major hospital. The building, costing a phenomenal \$425,000, when first constructed was comprised of only the center and north sections, and could accommodate 344 patients. The building received additions in 1911, 1916, 1927-28, 1934, 1941, 1962, and 1973, all of which were constructed to meet the demands of this important health care facility. Frederick C. Gunn, Walter Root, and George Siemens, each locally prominent architects, designed the original building. The architects purposefully combined the poetic with the utilitarian in the style of this Jacobean-influenced structure. The original H-shaped plan with projecting end wings was intended to provide the maximum available light and cross ventilation. At the time of its construction the building was distinguished for its combination of modern features and historical architectural precedents. Today, its architectural features alone make it an outstanding contribution to the City's built environment.

Part I. Historical Information

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection:

Construction of the original portion of the building began in 1905. This section was essentially completed in 1908 and the buildings were moved into on October 8, 1908. While the three main sections of the building were designed as a unit, only the center and north wings were origi-

nally constructed. Additions to the building were made in 1911, 1916, 1927-28, 1934, 1941, 1962, and 1973.

2. Architects:

The architects for the original portion of the building were Frederick Gunn, Walter Root, and George Siemens.

Frederick Gunn:

Frederick Gunn was born in Atchison, Kansas in 1865. He graduated from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1873. Between 1890 and 1899 he was a principal in the Kansas City architectural firm of Gunn & Curtiss and he continued to practice independently until 1952. The Gunn and Curtiss firm designed several county court houses. In the late 1890's Gunn was superintendent of construction of the Federal Building in Kansas City.

Walter Root:

Walter Root was born in 1859 in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1880 he graduated from the College of the City of New York and then studied two years with architect and critic, Russell Sturgis. Walter Root's older brother was John Welborn Root, a member of the influential Chicago architectural firm of Burnham & Root. In 1882 Walter Root moved to Chicago to work in his brother's office. The firm sent him to Kansas City in 1886 to oversee the construction of several buildings, where he remained and set up his own practice. In 1896 he formed a partnership with George Siemens that lasted until Root's death in 1925.

George Siemens:

George Siemens was born in Jefferson City, Missouri around 1864. He grew up in St. Joseph, Missouri and began his architectural practice there, drafting for the firm of Eckel and Mann. He was a graduate of the Cornell University School of Architecture. From 1896 to 1925 he was a partner in the Kansas City firm, Root and Siemens. Following Walter Root's death, Siemens continued to practice independently until 1941.

The architects for the additions were:

- 1911 - Frederick Gunn
- 1916 - Frederick Gunn
- 1927-28 - Frederick Gunn (attrib.)
- 1934 - A.W. Archer
- 1941 - Keene & Simpson
- 1962 - Monroe & Lefebvre
- 1973 - Monroe & Lefebvre

3. Builders, Suppliers:

Original Section:

Contractor - Charles C. Smith

Additions:

- 1911 - Contractor, James Taylor
- 1941 - Contractor, Interstate Construction Co.
- 1962 - Contractor, S.R. Brunn
- 1973 - Contractor, Sharp Brother Construction Co.

4. Original Plans and Construction:

Several drawings and plans of the original construction have been located. The building was constructed according to the original plans. The interior layout has been altered many times over the years to meet the changing requirements of improving health care. However, the

use of wards instead of individual patient rooms, continued to be a feature of the interior scheme.

5. Alterations and additions:

- 1911 - separate isolation wing erected at north end of property
- 1916 - south wing added
- 1927-28 - annex addition to east end of isolation wing
- 1934 - receiving wing erected, connecting isolation wing with original north wing
- 1941 - addition of southeast wing
- 1962 - addition of Diagnostic and Treatment Center
- 1973 - two stories added to Diagnostic and Treatment Center

B. Historical Context:

The city has provided medical care for its indigent citizens since 1867. A summary of the events related to municipal medical in Kansas City prior to the construction of the Kansas City General Hospital shortly after the turn-of-the-century follows:

- 1867 - ground purchased for a municipal hospital near 22nd Street and McCoy for \$1,800.
- 1868 - Dr. D.E. Dickerson appointed first city physician.
- 1869 - two medical colleges opened in Kansas City.
- 1870 - first hospital in the city, Kansas City General Hospital, built on property at 22nd and McCoy. This one story frame structure accommodated approximately 15 beds.
  - medical colleges merged to form Kansas City College of Physicians and Surgeons.
- 1874 - hospital building destroyed by fire.
- 1875 - two frame buildings replaced destroyed structure--one for men, one for women, each containing fourteen beds.

- 1878 - Board of Health created by City ordinance.
- 1880 - meeting held to consider providing more adequate hospital facilities.
- 1884 - brick hospital building erected to accommodate 40 patients. This building, with the two frame buildings, served as the City Hospital until 1895.
- 1895 - one frame structure demolished and replaced by a two-story brick building. This provided two brick buildings. The remaining frame structure was used to house patients with contagious diseases.
- 1897 - original brick building remodeled and enlarged.
- 1899 - another one story brick building erected, with 40 beds, for patients with tuberculosis and other contagious diseases. At the close of the century, the City had 3 brick hospital buildings with 175 beds and had cared for 1,876 patients during the year.

By 1903 the hospital was severely overcrowded, reflecting the continuing growth in Kansas City's population. The 175 bed capacity was stretched to 200 by putting cots in halls or by putting two patients to a bed. That year \$225,000 in bonds were voted to provide a new hospital building. Construction of the new hospital building was completed in 1908.

## Part II. Architectural Information

### A. General Statement:

#### 1. Architectural Character:

This structure was built on a high rise of ground in the Midtown area. Because of the visibility of this structure and the construction of other hospital buildings nearby, this prominence became known as "Hospital Hill".

The hospital was built as a "semi-detached" pavillion system--that is, each service was accommodated in a building virtually separated from the others, but for convenience of operation, connected by hallways. Thus the building was divided into an administrative area, service area, and patient care area. The building, with Jacobean

stylistic elements, was designed with the consideration that there would be two primarily views of the building. The north facade would be viewed primarily from a distance, while the west (main) facade would be seen at a closer vantage point. The north facade was distinguished by two square towers, connected by a simple loggia. The west facade was marked by a decorative entrance way.

2. Condition of the fabric:

The exterior brick masonry is sound. Some of the exterior decorative details (finials, plaques) have been removed. All decoration and most fixtures on the interior have been removed.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions:

The building is four-stories in height with a raised basement. The plan is irregular. The building occupies the block bounded by Locust Street, Kenwood Avenue, Twenty-Third Street, and Twenty-Fourth Street. The main facade has a frontage of approximately 340 feet on Locust Street. The north facade extends approximately 310 feet along Twenty-Third Street.

2. Foundations:

The raised basement level of the center section has walls of cut stone. The basement walls of the flanking wings feature alternating bands of brick and stone. The top course is a smooth, hammer-dressed stone.

3. Walls:

a) West Elevation - While the building was originally designed as three connecting units (center, north, and south wings), only the center wing and north wing were constructed in 1905-08.

The main entrance to the hospital is centrally located on the west facade of the center building. This section is four stories in height and also has a raised basement. The entrance is approached by a staircase. An ornamental stone panel over the entrance is carved with a verse from Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice describing the quality of mercy. The fourth floor of this section features decorative stone window surrounds and an ornamental central parapet projection.

The projecting north and south wings, each four stories high, terminate on the west facades with three-story, polygonal bays. The corners of the projecting wings terminate in small crenelated turrets that rise above the roof line. The parapet peaks in the center between the turrets.

The decorative embellishments, including stone window surrounds, and banding are derived from Jacobean architectural precedents.

b) North Elevation - Because the building is sited on a grade that drops toward the north, a raised basement level is more prominent on the north wing.

The north facade of the north wing was originally more visible before being partially obscured by additions. The facade was distinguished by two, large square towers rising above the roof line, with loggias placed between them. The top levels of the towers feature stone ornament and gargoyles projecting from the corners.

c) East Elevation - A view of the east facade of the original hospital is obscured by the Diagnostic and Treatment Center addition of 1961 and 1973. This rectangular addition features lower floors veneered in brick. The exterior wall surfaces of the upper floors are covered with pre-cast concrete panels.

d) South Elevation - Three different periods of construction are visible on the south facade. At the west end of the south facade is the south wing addition of 1916. This wing is harmonious in material and ornament with the center and north wings. A projecting bay at the east end of this section contains a secondary entrance.

Adjoining the south wing at the east end is the 1941 southeast wing addition. This two story wing is fenestrated with paired windows. A single stone lintel is placed over each window pair, while separate stone sills are used for each individual window.

Visible further to the east, adjoining the southeast wing, is the end wall of the Diagnostic and Treatment Center addition of 1962 and 1973.

4. Structural System, Framing:

Exterior walls are brick, load-bearing. Interior steel columns on concrete footings provide additional structural support for the majority of the building.

5. Openings:

a) Doorways and Doors - The primary entrance doors on the west facade have been boarded over.

b) Windows - Original plans indicate the use of rectangular double-hung, one-over-one light, sash windows. All original windows have been replaced with a variety of replacement types. The majority of the window openings feature stone sills and lintels.

6. Roof:

The flat roof has a tar and gravel surface. The roof line is complicated by a number of tower, turret, and finial projections.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

A long north/south corridor connects the three major sections of the building. The west section of the center wing functions as a vertical circulation core, with an elevator and a staircase. Additional stairways and elevators are located on the north/south connecting corridor just north and south of the center wing.

Floor plans for the original center and north wings indicate the following:

a) Center Wing: Basement - contained kitchen and dining rooms. Opening into the basement are tunnels that connect the hospital building with the Municipal Hospital Service Building to the north (514 East 22nd Street) and with the Nurse's Home on the south (515 East 24th Street).

First Floor - contained the entrance lobby, X-ray and laboratory space, and other office areas.

Second and Third Floors - contained operating room facilities and surgical amphitheater.

b) North Wing: Basement - contained machinery areas and morgue.

Upper Floors - an east/west corridor runs the length of these floors, which were used as patient wards. Sun porches are at the east and west ends of the north wing. Access to the central portico on the north facade was from the center section of this wing on the third floor.

c) South Wing: When this wing was constructed in 1916 the floor plan was virtually identical to that of the north wing.

d) Sub-Basement: This level accommodated a power plant and laundry facilities.

2. Flooring:

Hardwood floors were laid on eight inch thick concrete.

3. Wall Finish:

Interior walls were finished in hard, polished concrete, painted for easy cleaning.

4. Decorative Features, Lighting Fixtures:

All decorative elements and most lighting and plumbing fixtures have been removed from the building.

D. Site:

In 1905 Col. Thomas Swope donated the 4½ acre site now occupied by General Hospital. The elevated site, considered important for providing access to pure air, also presented the possibility of surrounding the hospital building with beautiful grounds. The site offered commanding views to the west and toward the downtown area to the north.

While this general location has a long historical association with hospital buildings, the erection of General Hospital in 1908 led to the elevated hill site becoming known as "Hospital Hill. Other health-related buildings were erected in the vicinity over the years, so that now General Hospital is part of a complex of buildings. The design for General Hospital set a precedent that was followed by later structures (German Hospital, Research Training School, the General Hospital Nurse's Home, and the Central Fire Exchange Building). Even as late as 1928-30, one of the original designers of General Hospital, Frederick Gunn, was designing General Hospital No. 2 in a visually compatible style. Beginning in 1952 with the construction of the Psychiatric Receiving Hospital, a more modern architectural style began to be used.

General Hospital itself commands the most visible location. Immediately in front of the entrance, on the west, is a landscaped, oval parking area. Further west of the building, below grade is a landscaped traffic island that separates Locust Street and Gillham Road. To the north is a block of green space known as Hospital Hill Park. At the northeast corner of this block is a building erected in 1952, the Psychiatric Receiving Hospital (2200 Kenwood).

Further north, across East 22nd Street are additional buildings which were erected by the city: at the west end of the block is the Central Fire Exchange Building, erected in 1923, (418 East 22nd Street); in the middle of the block is General Hospital No. 2 (600 East 22nd Street). This building was erected in 1928-30, with major additions in 1939-40 and 1962. Adjacent to the east, across Kenwood, is the Kansas City Diagnostic Clinic, erected in 1969-71 (610 East 22nd Street).

The only major building loss to have occurred to date on Hospital Hill was the demolition of German Hospital (later known as Research Hospital) in 1977. This building was erected in 1910-11 on the block adjacent to General Hospital on the east. That block of land is now used for surface parking. The block to the immediate north contains the Research Training School of Nurses (2210 Holmes), erected in 1926. Two blocks east of General Hospital is the Truman Medical Center, erected in 1973-76 (2301 Holmes). The building is connected to General Hospital by an aerial walkway that crosses over the block on which German Hospital was formerly located. Connected to Truman Medical Center, to the south, is the University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine (2411-17 Holmes), erected in 1972-74.

A major expansion of Hospital Hill has occurred south of General Hospital. In 1927 a Nurses's Home (a school of nursing and dormitory) was erected immediately south of General Hospital (515 East 24th Street). That building has since been

connected to the building to the south of it, Children's Mercy Hospital, which was erected in 1968-70. A 1974 parking structure for Children's Mercy Hospital is also south of General Hospital.

General Hospital has long been the most visible symbol of "Hospital Hill" and the building that serves to unify the area by its history and style.

### Part III. Sources of Information

#### A. Original Architectural Drawings:

Several drawings of the building and later additions are in the possession of the City Architect's Office, City Hall, 17th Floor, Kansas City, Missouri. The collection includes floor plans, exterior detailing, and elevations of the north and center wings.

The Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri-Kansas City also has some original plans and plans for later alterations and additions.

#### B. Old Views:

The Jackson County Medical Journal, October 1, 1932, published three photographs of the building: 1) a detail of the entrance; 2) a view of the original north and center wings; 3) and a view of the entire complex that dates c.1932.

An elevation sketch of the building was published in the First Annual Report of the Board of Hospital and Health, for the fiscal year April 20, 1908 - April 19, 1909.

The Seventh Annual Report of the Hospital and Health Board of Kansas City, Missouri, for the fiscal year April 20, 1914 - April 19, 1915 included a photograph of the isolation wing.

Two views were published in the Annual Report of the Hospital and Health Board of Kansas City, Missouri, for the year ending April 21, 1919. One view was of the entire building: north, south, and center wings. The other view showed the

isolation wing and the north facade of the north wing.

C. Bibliography:

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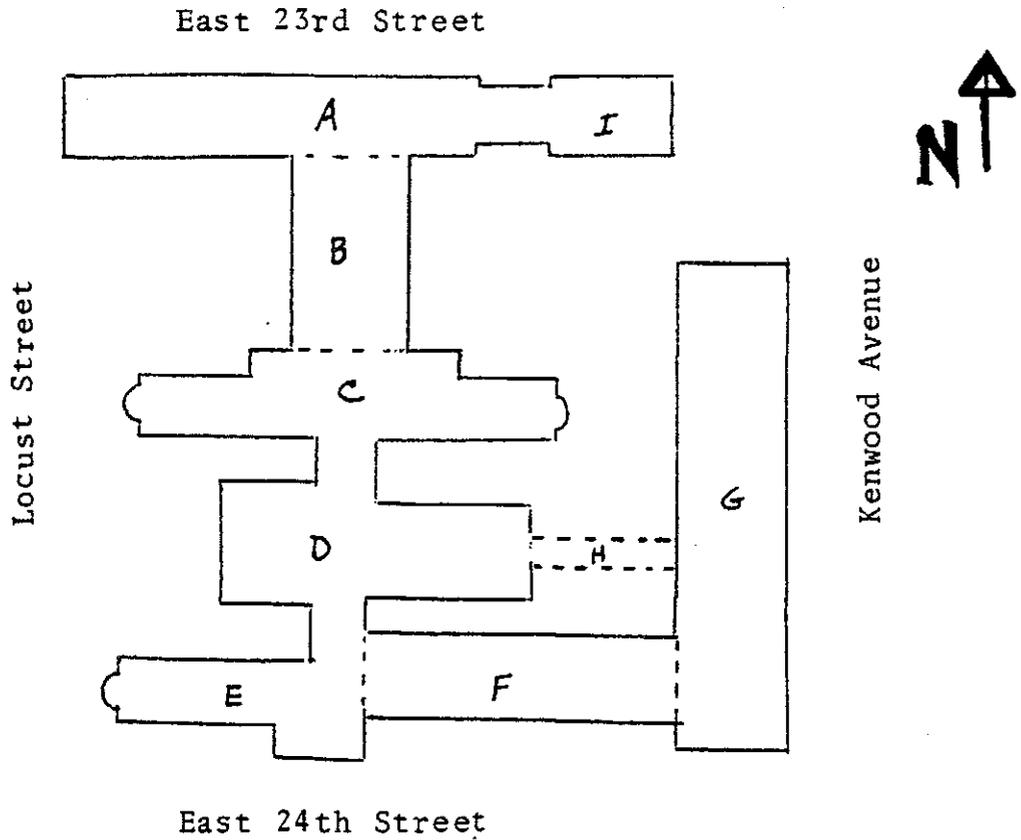
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Landmarks Commission  
Kansas City, MO  
January, 1985



GENERAL HOSPITAL - Site Plan

KEY:

- A - Isolation Wing addition, 1911
- B - Receiving Wing addition, 1934
- C - North Wing, original construction 1905-08
- D - Center Wing, original construction 1905-08
- E - South Wing addition, 1916
- F - Southeast Wing addition, 1941
- G - Diagnostic and Treatment Center addition, 1962 and 1973
- H - Ramp at 3rd floor level connecting Center Wing with Diagnostic and Treatment Center
- I - Annex addition to east end of Isolation Wing, 1927-28

Not to Scale