VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL, BUILDING NO. 24
(Officers' Duplex Quarters)
701 St. Louis Avenue
Excelsior Springs
Clay County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-1931-B

HABS
MO
24-EXPRI,
1B-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Great Plains Support Office
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha, Nebraska 68102-2571

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL
BUILDING NO. 24
(Officers' Duplex Quarters)

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Location: The historic Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital is located at 701 St. Louis Avenue, Excelsior Springs, Missouri. Building No. 24 is located at the south end of the twenty-five acre complex just south of Building No. 14, west of the main drive.

Significance: Constructed in 1931 in the Colonial Revival Style, Building No. 24 is a good example of an early twentieth century revival style as adapted by the federal government for institutional use. As one of two duplex quarters built for the officers/physicians at the Veterans Administration Hospital complex, the building is significant as contributing to the larger VA facility, and represents a period of expansion at the site which occurred during the Great Depression. The Veterans Administration Hospital complex is representative of the federal government's efforts to provide medical services to wounded and disabled veterans from 1921, when construction began, through the closing of the site by the VA in 1965.

Description: This two-story masonry building with stucco exterior is located at the southwestern end of the twenty-five acre Veterans Administration Hospital complex, in a group of two other historic residential buildings. The building is a good example of the Colonial Revival style, with Adamesque influence, as adapted to an institutional setting. The identifying features of this style include: the raised foundation with beltcourse; the pedimented entry doors with engaged columns and semi-circular fanlight; the symmetrical arrangement of the facade, punctuated by double-hung, six-over-six windows; a steeply pitched gable roof with stepped-end parapets and modillions on a narrow cornice band; gable roof dormers, also with double-hung, six-over-six windows; and flanking one-story porches at both gable ends with flat roof and entablature supported by Doric columns. A large metal fire escape was added (date unknown) to both ends of the porches, and the north porch has been enclosed with board and batten wood siding (date unknown). The rear (south) facade has two projecting one-story bays with flat roofs.

As historic floor plans were not available, a complete evaluation of integrity, both interior and exterior, is not possible. However, visual inspection indicates that the rrom arrangements are probably intact from the time of their construction. The duplex quarters are mirror images of each other. A small entry vestibule is centered on each half of the building, with a large living room on the gable end, and two smaller rooms towards the center of the building. The living room features a large fireplace with decorative Adamesque details, such as grooved pilasters on the side and an urn centered above the fireplace opening. Double multi-paned doors flank the fireplace and lead to the porch. Interior wood trim on both the first and second floors consists of simple molding around the fenestration and a wide baseboard. Arched entries which lead from

the entry vestibule to the rooms on either side feature a decorative wood keystone. A dog-legged staircase leads upstairs to three bedrooms and a bath. Carpeting and tile flooring are probably not original, and the upstairs rooms, in particular, have suffered extensive water damage.

History: On November 30, 1930, the Marley Construction Company of Kansas City, Missouri, was awarded the contract for the two identical Officers' Duplex Quarters at the Veterans Administration Complex in Excelsior Springs. The contract for construction of both buildings was $58,005.00. Here with Adamesque details, the Colonial Revival Style building had favorable historical connotations which hearken back to this country's architectural roots. The austere symmetrical arrangement of Building No. 24, with classically inspired details made it eminently suitable for its role as officers' duplex housing. The two duplex quarters were completed in 1931 during a period of expansion at the complex, and provided residential quarters for the officers/physicians at the hospital. Building No. 24 provided living quarters for two officers' families, with a total of four residential units provided by the two buildings. This complex, unlike other hospitals or clinics within the town of Excelsior Springs, was nearly self-sufficient. It had its own power plant, laundry facilities, cafeteria, and living quarters for much of the staff. Building No. 24 was part of the effort to make the complex self-sufficient.

The entire Veterans Administration Hospital complex is representative of the federal government's efforts to provide medical services to wounded and disabled veterans. The Excelsior Springs hospital complex represents the period from the inception of the Veterans Administration after the first World War, through its changing functions during later military efforts, to its closing in 1965 after consolidation within the bureau.

The first federal agency charged with the purpose of assisting veterans' health needs was the Public Heath Service, formed at the end of World War I. That agency was aided by the American Legion, but did not have authority to purchase lands for hospitals. Instead, the agency leased suitable properties. Thus Colonel E.L. Morse was approached about the possibility of leasing his large residence for use as a veterans hospital. Before construction was finished, however, the Veterans Bureau was formed. After some delays and controversy about the selection of the Morse property as a site, construction at the complex continued and the hospital was dedicated on Armistice Day in 1924. Major development of the property, requiring the closing and evacuation of the hospital, began in 1929. Patients were admitted again in 1931.

The Excelsior Springs VA Hospital complex was part of a network of federal hospitals which provided care to this nation's veterans. The hospitals were each assigned specific functions to serve within the larger network. The Excelsior Springs complex was originally designated a "General Medical and Surgical" hospital, but was later re-classified as a "Tuberculosis" hospital in 1941. Construction continued at the complex from the 1930s through 1950s, in response both to the changing function of the site, as well as the needs of additional patients from various

military conflicts. However, the medical needs of the patients continued to change, and the 1950s saw a drastically reduced demand for tuberculosis hospitals. Declared obsolete in 1956, the Excelsior Springs stations was eventually closed in 1963 and the building "mothballed" in 1965.

In 1966, the Department of Labor began operation of a federal Job Corps Center at the former Excelsior Springs VA hospital site. The Job Corps Center was originally planned for women only, but has since allowed male students. Building No. 24 served as the female orientation dormitory through at least 1988. Since at least 1994, the building has been vacant. Building and maintenance trade students at the Job Corps Center have stripped the building of its plumbing fixtures.

Sources:

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