

U.S. VETERANS HOSPITAL, JEFFERSON BARRACKS,  
RECREATION BUILDING  
(Veterans Administration Facility, Jefferson Barracks, Building No. 24)  
(Veterans Administration Hospital, Jefferson Barracks)  
(Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks  
Division, Canteen, Library & Auditorium)  
VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division  
1 Jefferson Barracks Drive  
Saint Louis  
Independent City  
Missouri

HABS MO-1943-L  
*MO-1943-L*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### U.S. VETERANS HOSPITAL, JEFFERSON BARRACKS, RECREATION BUILDING (BUILDING 24)

HABS No. MO-1943-L

- Location:** Building 24, VA Medical Center, 1 Jefferson Barracks Drive,  
St. Louis, Missouri  
USGS Quadrangle Oakville, Missouri  
UTM Coordinates 16 7258545 E 9965666N
- Date of Construction:** 1936
- Designer:** U.S. Veterans Administration (VA)
- Contractor:** Unknown
- Present Owner:** U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- Present Use:** Canteen, Library, and Auditorium
- Significance:** The Recreation Building was constructed in 1936 as part of a 1930s New Deal-era campaign to improve facilities at the U.S. Veterans Hospital, Jefferson Barracks. The building continued to serve as a recreational facility through the 1950s and was later converted to the hospital canteen, library, and auditorium. The second-floor auditorium space retains original wood Neoclassical Revival doors and wood trim and is one of the only remaining intact pre-World War II interior spaces on the medical center campus.
- Project Information:** This project was sponsored and funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as mitigation for the demolition of buildings at the St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, a property that has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places via consensus determination of eligibility between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources State Historic Preservation Office.

**Description:**

The Recreation Building (Building 24) is a three-story stucco-clad Neoclassical Revival building with a gabled asphalt-shingle roof. The building is seven bays wide and eleven bays deep, and features several porticos, including a six-column recessed porch on the west wall and a gabled four-column portico on the south wall. The main roof is gabled but is hidden by a series of parapets. The various wings of the buildings have smaller gabled roofs that intersect with the main roof. The building is situated west of the Main Hospital (Building 1) and faces landscaped-lawn areas to the south and west. The interior has been completely remodeled except for an auditorium on the second floor that is fairly intact, and a staircase and some other small second-story rooms that contain some original features. The first and second floors are full stories, while the third floor consists of only a few rooms that are positioned above the former lobby space for the auditorium.

The facade (south wall) features a central gabled portico. The first floor of this portico is now a blank stucco base, but it originally contained the main entrance into the building. The second floor of the portico has white metal replacement columns, installed within the past ten years to replace the original wood columns. The columns support a gabled pediment with a white cornice, a white raking cornice, and a white circular louvered vent in the center of the pediment. The center roof of the facade is gabled and was originally slate, and is now covered in asphalt shingles. The portico shelters several arched and rectangular windows, and the wall areas flanking the portico contain double-hung replacement windows. The central block also features stucco quoins at the corners. Two wings flank the central block. These wings are recessed back from the central block and feature double-hung replacement windows. Both wings are side gabled and have rusticated bases.

The east wall has two gabled bays. Each bay has a rusticated base and a mixture of windows and blind openings on the second and third floors. The attic level of each gabled bay features a blind lunette opening, a raking cornice, and two cornice returns. An above-ground connecting corridor is attached to the center of the east wall and connects the Recreation Building with the Main Hospital (Building 1).

The west wall of the Recreation Building has a six-column recessed porch sandwiched in between two identical gabled bays. Each gabled bay has a rusticated base, a mix of windows and blind openings on the second and third floors, and a blind lunette, raking cornice, and cornice returns in the attic gable. Each gabled bay also features stucco quoins. The recessed porch on the west wall has a base with arched openings; two of the openings have concrete steps leading up to them, although one of these openings is filled with a flat metal replacement door and the other is filled with a window. The second level of the porch features plain metal replacement columns that are painted white. The columns

support an entablature that appears to have been clad over with vinyl siding. The entablature is topped by a white cornice, and above the cornice is a white balustrade.

The building's north wall features a tall bay with a parapet and quoins. This bay has a high concrete staircase that leads up to a door on the second floor; the door is framed by a recessed blind arch opening.

The building's interior has been completely remodeled on the first floor, and this floor now contains a modern cantina. The second floor has remodeled corridor and administrative spaces but also contains an auditorium space that retains many of its original features. The auditorium has plaster walls and ceiling, and Neoclassical door casings with dog-eared corner moldings on the wood trim. Two of the door casings are capped with dentiled cornices, while one opening is topped with a gabled pediment. The room also features a large original stage, paneled wood doors, and original wall openings on each side of the stage, with the openings filled with original decorative metal grilles. The auditorium space is largely intact, except that a room-like gypsum board enclosure has been added at the rear, and the balcony has been removed. Most other areas of the second and third floor have been altered with post-1960 interior finishes. However, one staircase has original steel stair risers, stair treads, and metal railing. The library on the second floor also has a few original paneled wood doors.

### **History:**

The U.S. Veterans Hospital, Jefferson Barracks, was part of an early 1920s plan to reform health care for veterans. Before the early 1920s, health care for veterans had in many cases been dispensed from improvised facilities that were in poor condition and not well suited for the task. After a well-publicized tour of some of these hospitals, the U.S. Veterans Bureau began planning and construction on new, modern hospitals throughout the United States. Planning for the U.S. Veterans Hospital, Jefferson Barracks, including drafting of construction drawings, took place in 1922. Construction on the hospital complex began in 1922, and the buildings were completed in 1923.

The Recreation Building (Building 24) was part of a late 1930s expansion of the hospital, which by then was affiliated with the Veterans Administration, the agency that replaced the Veterans Bureau in 1930. Before the construction of the Recreation Building, the hospital campus recreation and theater facilities were composed of a small facility in the basement of the Main Hospital (Building 1). In the mid-to-late 1930s, several buildings were constructed at the hospital campus to accommodate activities that were originally housed in the Main Hospital. This work upgraded recreational, dining, and employee quarters at the hospital campus, and also allowed space inside the Main Hospital to be converted to additional medical facilities. The Recreation Building (Building 24) was constructed in 1936 to replace recreational rooms and a theater in the basement of the Main Hospital, and

the Dining Hall (Building 23) was built in 1937 to replace kitchen and dining facilities in the basement, first, and second floors of the center wing of the Main Hospital. The construction of Nurses' Quarters 2 in 1939 also appears to have allowed the Attendants' Quarters (Building 4) to be converted to a hospital ward building. This project may have been completed to racially segregate the VA campus by establishing a separate hospital in Building 4 for African American patients.

The Recreation Building was designed by Veterans Administration staff. Unlike the 1937 Dining Hall, which had a very plain and utilitarian exterior, the Recreation Building mimicked many of the Neoclassical Revival features that had been included in the Main Hospital in 1922-1923. The more elaborate design of the Recreation Building was likely influenced by its position on campus; the building was positioned directly west of the Main Hospital and would have been visible from the large lawn and drive that sat south of the Main Hospital. The original design of the Recreation Building included a portico on the building's south side with four wood columns and a gabled pediment, and a second portico on the building's west side with six columns and a balustrade above the entablature and cornice. The building's main roof was double-pitched, but the building's roof structure also included four large gabled sections, a small area of hipped roof at the front of the building (the south side), and a small area of flat roof at the back of the building.<sup>1</sup>

The interior of the Recreation Building included a first floor, a second floor with a theater-like recreation room, and a partial third floor. The building's first floor, which was originally considered to be the basement, contained a lobby, lounge, a small canteen, a smoking room, and a service room.<sup>2</sup>

The second-floor recreation room was a large auditorium with a 67'5" x 21'7-1/2" seating space, a large stage with backstage area, three dressing rooms, a storage room, and a lobby entered through the portico on the building's south wall. The recreation room was fitted with paneled wood doors, and the door casings were designed in a high-style Neoclassical mode with dog-eared moldings at the corner, and dentiled cornices and gabled pediments at the tops. The stage was flanked by two openings closed in with elaborate metal grilles. The recreation room as completed was a formal Neoclassical Revival space suitable for presentations, events, or small theater productions. The space also originally had a balcony and a projection room, so it would have accommodated motion-picture screenings.<sup>3</sup>

The remaining spaces in the second floor included a small prayer room and a small lounge. The partial third floor included restrooms, a lobby for the theater balcony, space for the hospital's special services (recreational services) office, and room for a small radio station.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Veterans Administration, *Recreation Building, Building No. 24, Veterans Administration Facility, Jefferson Barracks, Mo.*, 1936, on file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Patients at the hospital operated the radio station in the Recreation Building as part of the hospital's rehabilitation programs.<sup>4</sup> The radio station was located in the Recreation Building from 1936 until 1957, when it was relocated to the new Special Services Building (Building 61).

Building 24 continued to function as the hospital's recreation building through the 1940s. A connecting corridor was added in the 1940s, linked Building 24 to the Main Hospital (Building 1). A 1950 master plan map of the campus still identified Building 24 as the Recreation Building.<sup>5</sup>

In the late 1940s, the VA began making plans to convert the Jefferson Barracks VA Hospital campus into a neuropsychiatric hospital. New mental-health treatment buildings were constructed in 1950-1952, and the function of several of the pre-1950 hospital buildings were changed to fit into the new mission and layout of the campus. A new floor plan was drawn for the Recreation Building in 1951; the building retained its 1936 layout at that time except for the basement. The main space in the first floor, which had formerly served as a lounge, was converted to a sales and dining room. The small canteen space on the northwest corner of the first floor was converted to a kitchen to serve the new dining room. The recreation room on the second floor retained its original layout and continued to be used as an auditorium and theater space for the hospital.<sup>6</sup>

In 1955, plans were drawn up for a Special Services Building (Building 61) to enhance recreational facilities for the patients on the campus. The Special Services Building included a six-lane bowling facility, music rooms, and a library. The main feature of the building was a theater with approximately 500 seats, a full backstage area with dressing rooms, an orchestra pit, and a projection booth for motion pictures.<sup>7</sup> With the completion of the Special Services Building in 1957, the recreation room in the Recreation Building (Building 24) was no longer the main auditorium and theater space for the hospital, and some of the building's other recreational facilities may no longer have been needed. The Recreation Building's second-floor recreation room was retained as a secondary theater and auditorium space for the hospital. The offices and studio for the hospital's radio station were moved to the Special Services Building, and the former radio station space in the Recreation Building was converted to other uses.

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<sup>4</sup> "Radio Station Helps Patients' Morale at Jefferson Barracks," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 6, 1962, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, *St. Louis Dispatch* (1879-1922), St. Louis Public Library, St. Louis.

<sup>5</sup> Jamieson and Spearl, Architects and Engineers, *544-Bed Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Master Plan*, 1950, on file at St. Louis VA Hospital, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Veterans Administration, *Alterations to Recreation Building No. 24, Veterans Administration, Jefferson Barracks, Mo.*, 1951, on file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

<sup>7</sup> Maguolo and Quick, Architects and Engineers, *Construction Drawings for Additions and Alterations, Veterans Administration, Jefferson Barracks, Mo., Special Services Building, No. 61*, April 1955, on file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

The Recreation Building underwent remodeling and updates during the 1970s and 1980s, including replacement of all windows in 1981, but the ca. 1951 configuration of the canteen in the first floor and the auditorium on the second floor was retained. At an unknown date, the original entrance to the recreation room through the south portico was filled in, the balcony of the recreation room was removed, and the back of the recreation room was walled in for administrative space.<sup>8</sup>

By 1990, VA property lists recorded the Recreation Building as the Canteen, Library, and Auditorium.<sup>9</sup> Today, the building contains a canteen on the first floor and the auditorium space (formerly the recreation room) and a library on the second floor. The third floor contains a series of small office spaces. Currently, most of the interior of the building has been remodeled, but the building contains some interior spaces with original features. The cantina space on the first floor has been renovated within the last twenty years and contains no original interior finishes. The main staircase leading from the first floor to the second floor retains original paneled steel stair risers, original stair treads, and the original metal railing. The second-floor auditorium space has original walls, stage opening, wood door and window casings, and paneled wood doors. The building's library space has been remodeled but retains some original paneled wood doors.

Current redevelopment plans for the St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, call for demolition of some existing buildings and construction of new facilities. However, redevelopment plans for the medical center do not call for the Recreation Building (Building 24) to be demolished in the near future.

**Sources:**

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<sup>8</sup> U.S. Veterans Administration, Construction drawing files for Building 24, 1936-2010, on file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Annual Real Property Survey Report, Building Numbers and Locations, Jefferson Barracks VAMC*, 1990, on file at St. Louis VA Medical Center, Jefferson Barracks Division, Building 3T.

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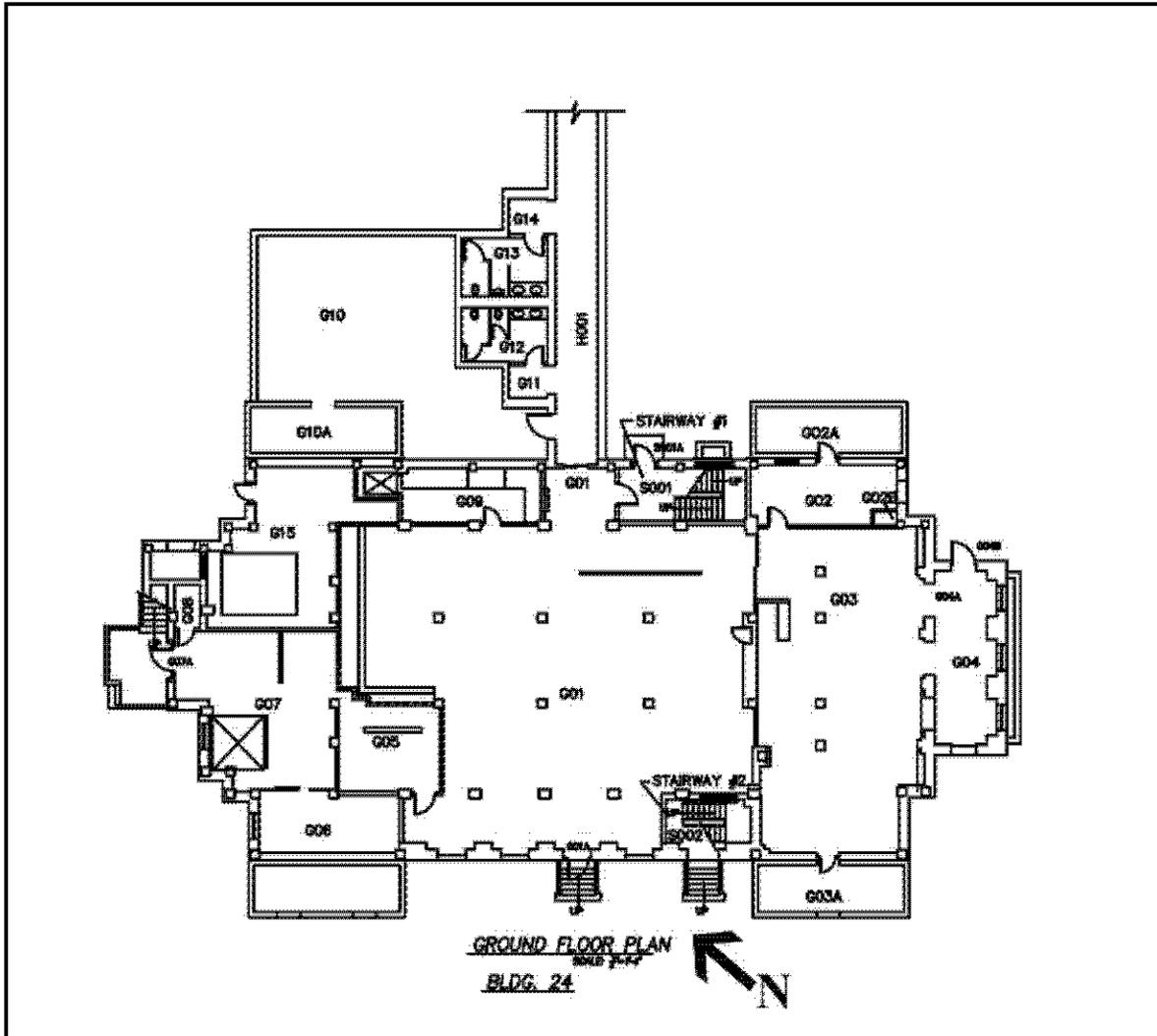
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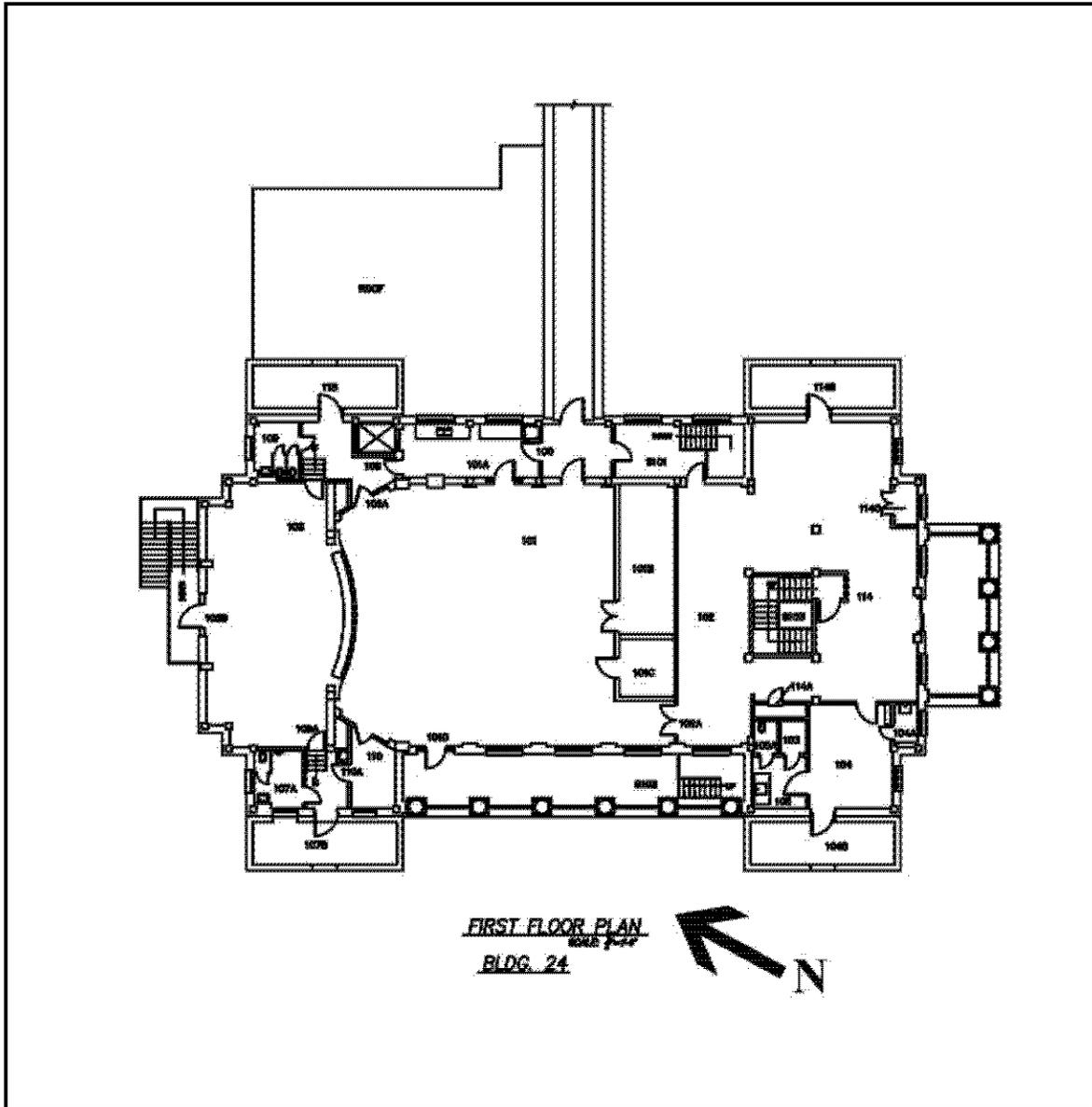
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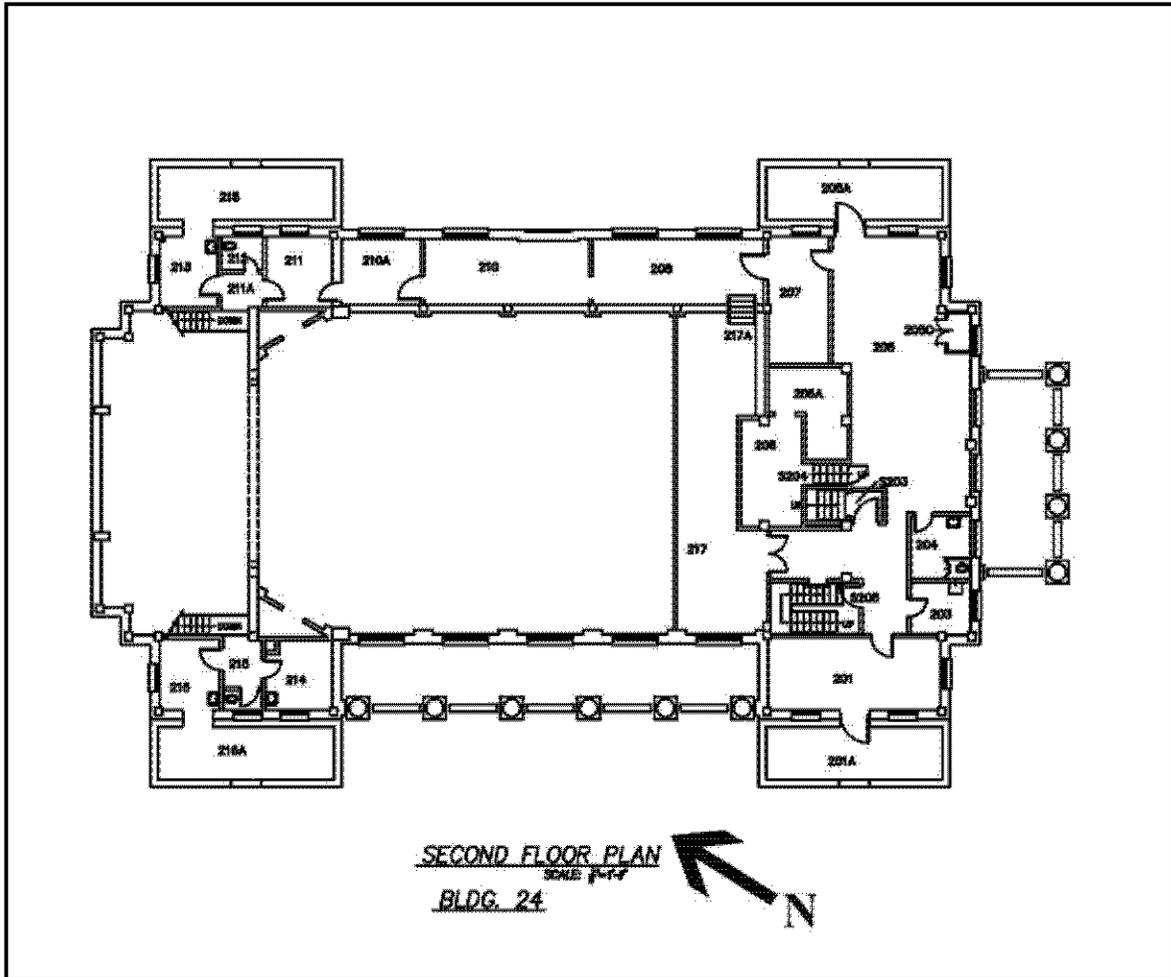
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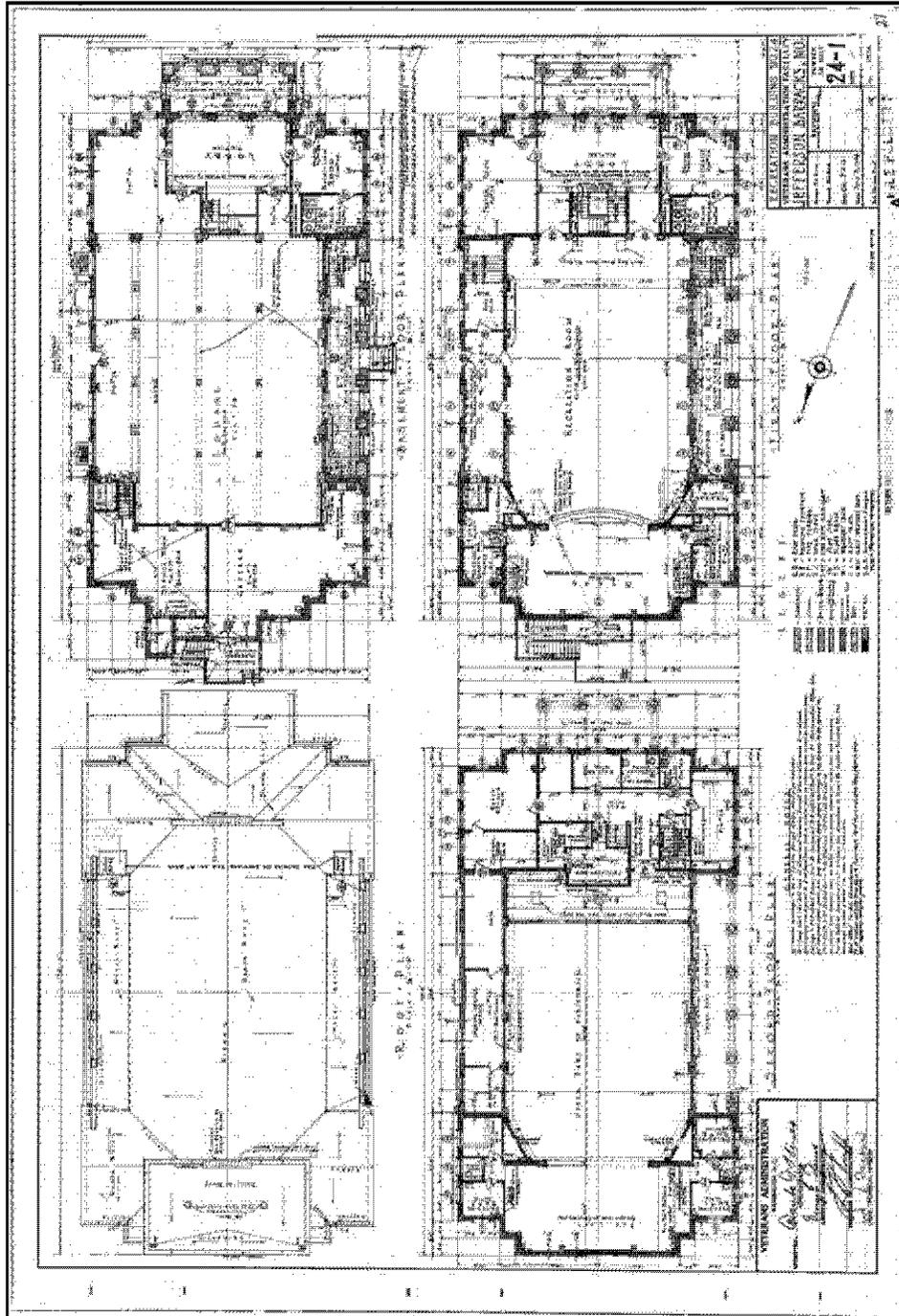
Recreation Building (Building 24), current floor plan for ground floor



Recreation Building (Building 24), current floor plan for first floor



Recreation Building (Building 24), current floor plan for second floor



Floor plans of the Recreation Building (Building 24), 1936