

PRATT & WHITNEY PLANT
Manufacturing Support
(Pratt & Whitney Plant, Building No. 13)
1500-2000 East Bannister Road
Kansas City
Jackson County
Missouri

HAER No. MO-118-D

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
Midwest Regional Office
National Park Service
601 Riverfront Drive
Omaha, Nebraska 68102

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: 1500-2000 East Bannister Road, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri

Present Owner: U.S. Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration

Present Use: This building is used for testing, assembly work, laboratory, and storage areas.

Significance: This building, constructed in 1957 by Westinghouse, served as a support building to the Main Manufacturing Plant. Westinghouse was responsible for manufacturing the J34 Gas Turbine engine, to the development of thermonuclear weapon components during the Cold War, the Kansas City Plant housed a multi-disciplinary engineering and manufacturing facility tied to the nation's homeland security. Due to the diversified requirements of subsequent corporations, the original Pratt & Whitney Plant was modified and added to, meeting the needs of ongoing technological advances while retaining the structural elements that made this complex a landmark of American industrial design.

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PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of Construction: 1957
2. Architect/Engineer: Wilson and Company, Salina, Kansas
3. Builder/Contractor/Supplier: Unknown
4. Original Plans: Unknown
5. Alterations and Additions: No

B. Historical Context

At the end of World War II, President Truman established the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). This was the beginning of the Cold War years and the beginning of a new era for the Kansas City Plant, which then was under the control of the Department of the Navy.

In November 1948, the Department of the Navy hired Westinghouse Corporation for the manufacturing of aircraft engines.¹ In January 1949, the Westinghouse Aircraft Gas Turbine (AGT) plant leased the former Pratt & Whitney Plant and hired 5,000 employees. Over the next year, Westinghouse AGT converted a portion of the Main Manufacturing Plant for a new use. By January 1, 1950, Westinghouse was producing an average of 150, J34s a month. In September 1951, just eighteen months after the plant began production Westinghouse completed its 3,000th J34 and tooled up to manufacture the J40 engine.²

Concurrently, the AEC selected the former Pratt & Whitney Plant as a manufacturing facility for non-nuclear electrical and mechanical components for nuclear weapons. Subsequently, Westinghouse sub-leased a portion of the Main Manufacturing Plant to AEC, with Bendix Corporation as their operational contractor. The initial installation of Bendix remained a secret and for years the area residents believed that the plant only manufactured washing machines.³

Between 1951 and 1959, the federal government and the U.S. Navy focused on missiles and deterrence. During this timeframe, Westinghouse AGT was in competition with General Electric,

¹ In August 1948, the Navy decided that Westinghouse Aircraft, Philadelphia, should increase the production of their J34 Gas Turbine engine.

² Smith, "A Brief History of Manufacturing," 2.

³ Honeywell Federal Manufacturing and Technologies, *Kansas City Plant: 60 Years, 1949-2009* (Kansas City: Honeywell Federal Manufacturing and Technologies, LLC, 2009), 37.

yet, the Westinghouse management staff was reluctant to invest in new technology. Additionally, a reduction of orders for the J34 and the J40 hurt Westinghouse by causing a steady decline in business for the Kansas City plant.⁴

On March 22, 1960, Westinghouse AGT announced their plan to discontinue the Aircraft Gas Turbine engine division. By December 1960, Westinghouse closed their entire operation at the Kansas City Plant.⁵ However, its parent company, the Bendix Corporation continued to lease the buildings at the complex through the next twenty years, yet the specifics of their production remains unclear.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

This two-story steel braced frame, brick building is connected to the Manufacturing Plant by a one-story unit. The building is mainly a single floor facility with a smaller second floor. The building occupies 142,516 gross square feet, measuring approximately 280' x 320'.

1. Architectural Character: Modern Industrial
2. Condition of Fabric: Excellent

B. Description of Exterior

The main façade faces south and features ribboned, metal-framed fixed fenestration, which flanks a deeply recessed main entrance (which projects from the main façade). There is no fenestration on the east façade, while the northeast and northwest corners of the building connect to Buildings No. 91 and 48, respectively. The exposed portion of the north façade features three large HVAC systems.

C. Description of Interior

The Manufacturing Support building contains laboratory space, a cafeteria, office space, and storage areas. Other than the cafeteria proper, access to the interior was restricted.

D. Site

Building No. 13 is connected to Building No. 1, the Main Manufacturing Plant, by a narrow hallway. To the south is a large surface parking lot. Buildings No. 91 and 48 are connected to the north façade of this facility.

⁴ Smith, "A Brief History of Manufacturing," 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*

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PART III. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

NNSA Archives. Bannister Federal Complex, 1500-2000 East Bannister Road, Kansas City, Missouri.