

BROOKS AIR FORCE BASE, BUILDING NO. 125
(Brooks Air Force Base, Research Institute)
2509 Kennedy Circle
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

HABS TX-3521-C
HABS TX-3521-C

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SOUTHWEST SYSTEM SUPPORT OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
PO Box 728
Santa Fe, New Mexico

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
BROOKS AIR FORCE BASE, BUILDING 125
(BROOKS AIR FORCE BASE, RESEARCH INSTITUTE)

HABS No. TX-3521-C

Location: 2509 Kennedy Circle
San Antonio
Bexar County
Texas

~~USGS Southton, Texas Quadrangle (7.5')~~

~~Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 14.552958, 3246613~~

Google Earth Lat/Long 29.34990200, -98.454540

Present Owner: Brooks Development Authority (BDA)

Present Occupant: Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL)

Present Use: Administrative offices

Significance: Building 125 (Research Institute) formed a vital component of the U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine (USAFSAM) campus at Brooks Air Force Base (AFB). Building 125, located on Kennedy Circle at the heart of the complex, combined administrative offices, study space, and specialized laboratories. These were used in support of USAFSAM's groundbreaking work in space research, as well as in clinical and military applications. The building is now utilized by the AFRL for administrative offices and the Total Building Department, and its interior has been modified from its original appearance.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: 1959
2. Architect: Charles H. Page, Jr. of Texas Architect-Engineers Associates
3. Original and subsequent owners: Air Force
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown
5. Original plans and construction: Original plans are on file with the BDA, 8030 Challenger Drive, Brooks City-Base.

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6. Alterations and additions: Building 125 has undergone numerous minor changes since its construction in 1959, but no major additions have been made. The most far-reaching change has been the alteration of interior spaces and replacement of some original interior finishes. Building 125 recently underwent asbestos abatement.

B. Historical Context:

Building 125 was among the first buildings erected in 1959 as part of USAFSAM's new home at Brooks AFB. The multiple-building complex represented the base's expanding role and mission as one of the largest aerospace medical research centers in the world. With research and development goals ranging from space to warfare, USAFSAM has played a central role in the mission of the Air Force as well as NASA. Though the USAFSAM campus was constructed in 1959, the history of Brooks AFB has involved multiple missions beginning with the training of Army pilots in World War I to reserve flight training during the Cold War.

Establishment of Brooks Field and Early Aviation Training, 1917-31

Established on an 873-acre tract of land in San Antonio, Texas, in November 1917, Kelly Field No. 5 grew out of the increasing wartime need for cadets and trainers. In February 1918, the airfield was officially renamed Brooks Field in honor of Cadet Sidney Johnson Brooks, Jr., a San Antonio native who died in a plane crash at Kelly Field No. 2 in 1917. The new commander of Brooks Field, Major Henry Conger Pratt, oversaw the installation's mission of preparing up to 5,000 airmen for wartime service in Europe. In addition, Brooks trained flight officers as teachers of a new British training regimen known as the Gosport System, which utilized innovative controls and speaking tubes to improve communication between instructors and cadets while in the air. The use of the Gosport system at Brooks Field convinced the War Department in October 1918, to incorporate the experimental system at Brooks Field into all Army airfields.¹

In May 1919 the Observation School at Camp Ben Wise in San Antonio, which trained cadets in the use of aerial observation, moved to Brooks Field. As one of five national balloon observation schools, Brooks Field provided surveillance along the U.S.-Mexico border utilizing the 16th Airship Company and the 4th and 5th Balloon companies. The balloon and airship program at Brooks Field, despite the initial investment of manpower and expense, proved to be a short-lived experiment for the San Antonio region. Several accidents involving explosions forced the school to close in 1922.²

The decision to remove the Balloon and Airship Observation School was part of a 1920 Army Reorganization Bill which stipulated that all flight training for the country would be centered in San Antonio air fields, including Brooks Field. By June 1922, Brooks Field was classified as the only Primary Flying School in the country as a result of the consolidation of two former flying schools in California and Florida. From 1922-31, Brooks Field earned the reputation of being one of the premier aviation training sites in the country and was responsible for developing the young Army Air Service at a crucial period of its growth.

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The system established in 1922 required all military aviators to begin their basic flying training at Brooks Field, with the graduating class moving on to the Air Service Advanced Flying School at Kelly Field. The graduating classes at Brooks later formed the basic structure of the Air Corps for decades to come. The school graduated numerous important aviators including Charles Lindbergh, Frank M. Hawks, Nathan Twining, Jimmy Doolittle, and Barney Giles. Instructors at Brooks were among the most experienced and talented aviators in the country, including Claire Chennault of the famed "Flying Tigers," Russell Maughan and Elwood Quesada.³

In addition to its celebrated graduates and instructors, Brooks Field was also the site of important advances in aviation. In April and September 1929 Brooks Field held public demonstrations of one of the earliest paratroop warfare experiments. In 1930, Colonel William C. Ocker devised a device allowing pilots to fly "blind" with the use of instruments inside the cockpit.⁴

School of Aviation Medicine (SAM), 1926-31

In 1926, SAM was relocated from Mitchell Field, New York to Brooks Field in an effort to improve pilot performance and to learn firsthand from pilots about the medical factors affecting flight. From 1926-31, flight surgeons at SAM generally acted as physicians first and teachers second; their main responsibility was to direct physical examinations to determine the condition of cadets for flying.

In 1931, SAM and the Primary Flying School moved to the newly created Randolph Field in San Antonio, Texas, ending Brooks Field's important aviation training mission. In the 1930s, Brooks was designated a center for observation training and housed several observation squadrons. Escalating tensions in Europe led to the establishment of an Air Corps Advanced Flying School in early 1941, which focused on training pilots in observation skills using single-engine aircraft. Because of lessons learned early in World War II, the Army Air Corps reassessed the importance of aerial observation, placing greater importance upon bombing and pursuit aircraft training. As a result, in 1943, Brooks Field began a training program for the new B-25 bomber, which greatly aided the war effort. Brooks Field became Brooks AFB in 1948 and assumed a new postwar mission as a reserve flight training center which it maintained until 1960 when all flight activities ceased.⁵

SAM: the Space Program to Vietnam, 1959-69

In 1959, SAM, now known as the School of Aerospace Medicine (SAM) was reassigned to Brooks AFB as part of a new Air Force mission to consolidate its aviation and space medicine efforts at one base. From 1959-69, Brooks AFB, as part of the Aerospace Medical Division (AMD), played a key role in providing NASA and the Air Force with innovative and important space medicine research, ensuring the success of the country's efforts in space exploration. Research at Brooks AFB utilized a range of laboratories and research facilities to perform experiments ranging from altitude and pressure experiments to space food nutritional studies. In addition to direct contributions to NASA's Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs, Brooks focused much of its space medicine efforts on the Air Force's military space program, the Manned Orbiting Laboratory (MOL). By the mid-1960s, researchers and physicians at Brooks

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AFB increasingly became involved in the Vietnam War, forcing SAM and AMD to manage dual missions of space and warfare.

The USAFSAM Campus

In 1952, with its intention to relocate the crowded facilities at Randolph AFB to Brooks AFB, the Air Force required a new master plan accommodating the new "Aeromedical Center." Early in the planning stages, officers of the Air Force Headquarters in Washington, D.C., had a clear notion of the type of facility they wanted, distinguishing it from other Air Force installations: "Consideration should be given to permanence and preeminence of this facility as an academic institution . . . The quality of construction should be comparable to that of the leading medical institutions in the United States."⁶ In designing the master plan for such an institution, officers of the Headquarters of the Air Force made an unqualified recommendation for the St. Paul, Minnesota firm of Ellerbe & Company, which already had two years experience with an earlier Brooks AFB master plan:

The Ellerbe Company, because of the design over the past twenty-five years of the varied and highly specialized diagnostic research and hospital facilities for the Mayo Clinic at Rochester, Minnesota, is considered eminently qualified to continue this project.⁷

By 1954, however, Ellerbe & Company was unwilling or unable to finish work on the design of USAFSAM. Rising construction costs and the Korean War also delayed work on the project. To complete the building designs, Ellerbe & Company selected Charles Page, Jr. of C.H. Page & Son as a subcontractor. Graduating from the University of Texas School of Architecture in 1932, Charles H. Page, Jr. joined his father, C.H. Page, a prominent Austin architect, in 1936. The new firm specialized in the design of hospitals, schools, and military installations, including the Driscoll Children's Hospital in Corpus Christi, Texas, Bergstrom AFB in Austin, Texas, and flight laboratories at the White Sands Proving Grounds in New Mexico.

Although C.H. Page and Charles H. Page, Jr. were the firm's principals until C.H. Page's death in 1957, the firm often collaborated with other architecture and engineering firms, using some variant of the name "Texas Architect-Engineer Associates," as they did on the plans for the first five buildings constructed for USAFSAM, including Building 100. Architects at C.H. Page & Son were given the task of preparing a contour and building model of the entire site, later identified as 'The Hill,' in order to study at least three possible site plans for the school. Ellerbe's schematic plot plans and site studies were to be used as the basis for Page's work.

The Texas Architects-Engineer Associates completed plans for the first five buildings on the USAFSAM campus: Building 100 (Flight Medicine Laboratory); Building 125 (Research Institute); Building 130 (Research Laboratory Shops); Building 160 (Altitude Laboratory); and Building 180 (Academic Building). Plans for these structures are dated between 1956-58, and all are signed by Charles H. Page, Jr.

Building 125

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Construction of Building 125 was completed in the summer of 1959. Building 125 functioned as the core of USAFSAM, where many administrators had offices on the first, second and third floors alongside specialized laboratories, study carrels for research scientists, and computer processing rooms. The fourth floor contained the small-animal vivarium, along with operating and observation rooms. After the Project Mercury test flights utilizing monkeys launched in biopacks to test the effects of orbital flight, Miss Sam, the second test subject, retired to the small-animal vivarium in Building 125, where she was often visited by USAFSAM staff.⁸ The basement contained two precision instrument rooms with concrete calibration piers for making specialized tools, as well as sound laboratories and related chambers for sound and vibration studies. A separate, single-level wing on the east of the main block of Building 125 was known as the 'hot wing,' where studies on X-rays and radiation were conducted in a highly controlled environment.

Although Building 125 was constructed as a highly specialized facility for about \$41.00 per square foot (versus less than \$17 dollars per square foot for USAFSAM administration buildings), it has often served less technical purposes. In June 1963 the building was occupied by a part of the AMD administration staff, which was scattered throughout eleven buildings at Brooks AFB. By the mid-1980s, Building 125 was seeing more educational use than research activity. Although the building remained structurally sound, the laboratories and classrooms were technologically out of date and required asbestos abatement. Therefore, a new USAFSAM academic building was constructed on the older part of the base near the main gate, and Building 125 was upgraded to serve as an administrative facility for varied smaller organizations. These included AMD offices such as Public Affairs, Judge Advocate, Comptroller, and Research and Development, as well as some small base offices. The building is now only partially occupied by the Air Force Total Building department and administrative offices of the Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Building 125 was built in 1959 as the Research Institute of the USAFSAM campus at Brooks AFB. Part of the original group of five buildings designed by Charles H. Page, Jr., Building 125 reflects the International Style popular in the late 1950s, with red brick exterior walls and ribbon windows framed by extruded aluminum, a flat roof, and a rectangular plan. The design of Building 125 was intended to evoke a private university rather than a typical military installation, and was also dictated in part by the technical requirements of specialized laboratory research, resulting in scarce fenestration on the upper floors. The building is located on Kennedy Circle and is oriented towards the north, facing the other original USAFSAM buildings to reinforce the campus-like feel of the complex.

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2. Condition of fabric: Building 125 is in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Building 125 is irregular in plan and measures 270'-0" x 92'-0" overall. The main body of the building measures 191'-0" x 92'-0" and is four stories in height with a full basement and mechanical penthouse. A western wing is one story with a partial basement and measures 79'-0" x 73'-1".
2. Foundation: Concrete pier and beam
3. Walls: Exterior walls are face brick veneer laid in running bond on 8" (nominal) masonry backing.
4. Structural system, framing: Building 125 has a concrete frame structural system. Floors and roof are concrete slabs with one-way joists running north-south.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: An aluminum-and-glass exterior vestibule is a later addition to the main entrance.
6. Chimneys: None
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Building 125 contains nine exterior doorways.
 - North facade: The north facade contains the building's main entry, consisting of a plate glass storefront unit with two sets of double doors. Stone panels flank the glass doors, and aluminum signage on the limestone panel at right reads "Research Institute." The entry is complemented by an exposed concrete fin above, a granite porch, and stone planter boxes. A single secondary entrance in the radiation wing has a simple metal door with three inset vision panels and a small granite landing.
 - East facade: The east facade, facing Building 155, contains two identical entries. Each is approached by three granite steps and stone planter boxes. Stone surrounds frame single metal doors containing three square glazed panels.
 - South facade: The south facade contains two single metal doors with vision panels; one is at the basement level near the east side of the building, while the other allows access to the first floor, sitting atop an elevated sidewalk and a short flight of five concrete steps accessible from the west. A similar, but narrower door is at the right of the loading dock.

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The large loading dock access door is a metal, motor-operated roll-up door. The loading area is accented by an exposed concrete fin.

- West facade: The west facade contains a single metal door, with no glazing, near the center of the facade, approached by a concrete slab.

b. Windows and shutters:

- Basement: One set of coupled projected aluminum-sash windows in areaway on south facade.
- First floor: Coupled aluminum sash double-hung windows on the north and west facades of the main body of Building 125. Three single aluminum-sash double-hung windows on the first floor of the east facade.
- Floors two through four: Groups of four aluminum-sash, projected windows at stair landings, north and south facades.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The building has a flat roof with built-up roofing.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The exterior walls of Building 125 terminate in a brick parapet with limestone coping. The penthouse roof has a sheet metal gravel guard edge.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: There is a rooftop penthouse measuring 57'-0-1/2" x 155'-9-1/2". It is of steel frame construction with insulated metal wall panels.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: The basement, accessed by four elevators and three 180-degree return stairwells, has a central elevator core and southwest utility space for mechanical and electrical equipment, extending to the loading dock area on the south. Double-loaded corridors in a grid pattern provide access to sound laboratories, precision instrument rooms, general laboratories, and a few offices. A gas storage area is on the south side.
- b. First floor: The main portion consists of administrative offices with main corridors running east-west with north-south connecting corridors. The main entry on the north facade opens into a lobby, from which the double-loaded corridors extend to serve administrative offices in the south and central

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sections, and computing areas to the south. A central service core provides two passenger elevators, two service elevators, and an enclosed stair tower. A single-level west wing measuring 79'-5" x 73'-1" isolates x-ray facilities and a veterinary surgery room.

- c. Second floor: The second floor has a central building core with toilets, stairs, passenger and freight elevators, vertical chase. Additional stairs are located at the northwest and southeast corner of the floor. Two main corridors running east-west and three north-south connecting corridors serve a library on the south side, and research laboratories and offices in the central and north areas. A row of small study carrels lines the west wall.
 - d. Third Floor: The layout of the third floor is identical to that of the second floor. The third floor is filled almost entirely with laboratories, as well as two large darkrooms and study carrels.
 - e. Fourth Floor: The layout of the fourth floor is identical to that of lower floors, but is occupied by holding rooms for small and large animals.
2. Stairways: The main block of the building has three enclosed interior stairways: one in the central building core, one at the northwest corner, one at the southeast corner. All are two flights with a single landing and a 180-degree return. All provide access from the basement to the fourth floor. The building-core stair provides access to penthouse.
 3. Flooring: Terrazzo is used in the lobby and reception area. Original flooring for corridors and most laboratories and administrative spaces is vinyl tile on concrete, although most floors have now been covered with standard commercial-grade carpet.
 4. Walls and ceiling finishes: Most walls are smooth-finish plaster; other finishes include Keene's cement plaster, glazed structural units, and glazed wall tile. The lobby and first floor corridors have stained plywood paneling and a terrazzo base, while other corridors have plaster walls, wainscots of glazed structural units, and terrazzo bases. While the western corridors of the first floor retain their walnut paneling, the east corridors have been covered with a fabric covering.
 5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Typical interior doors are 3'-0" x 7'-0" x 1³/₄" solid-core wood flush doors. Corridor doors on the first floor have vision panels. Other door types include hollow metal doors, metal vault doors, and fabric accordion doors.

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- b. Windows: Building 125 has few exterior windows, mainly aluminum sash windows at stair landings and at the first level of the north and east facades (see above).
6. Decorative features and trim: None.
7. Hardware: Standard commercial-grade manufactured hardware with a brushed-chrome finish.
8. Mechanical Equipment:
- a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Building 125 is equipped with central heating and air conditioning.
 - b. Lighting: Typical lighting is recessed fluorescent troffers.
 - c. Plumbing: Floors 1-4 have men's and women's toilets. The men's toilet on each floor contains four water closets with flush valves, five lavatories, and two urinals. The women's toilets contain two water closets with flush valves and two lavatories. Nearly all laboratories and program support areas have sinks.
- D. Site:
- 1. General setting and orientation: Building 125 is located in the northwest portion of the USAFSAM campus. It is bounded on the north by Kennedy Circle, on the south by a service drive and Building 130, on the east by Building 155, and on the west by a service drive and Building 110. The principal facade faces north toward Kennedy Circle.
 - 2. Historic landscape design: Original drawings do not specify plantings near the building, nor do early photographs. The primary landscaping features of Building 125 include the sidewalk perpendicular to and parallel to the primary entrance of the north facade and the terracing and brick retaining walls on the south facade.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings: Original drawings by Texas Architect-Engineer Associates are held by the BDA, 8030 Challenger Drive, Brooks City-Base, Texas.
- B. Early views: Some early views of Building 125 and surrounding buildings are available in the archives of the Edward H. White II Museum of Aerospace Medicine in Hangar 9 at Brooks City-Base, and the Austin History Center, Austin Texas.

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C. Interviews: Dr. George Schafer, Lieutenant General, USAF Retired, *Oral History Interview by HHM, Inc.*, November 22, 2002.

D. NOTES

¹ Martha Freeman, "Appendix L: Historic Context: Brooks Air Force Base, An American Flying Field, 1917-1946." in *Brooks Air Force Base – Historic Preservation Plan* by D.E. Peter, M.B. Cliff, J. Freeman and K.L. Kane. Geo-Marine, Inc., Plano, Texas, L-3.

² Brooks Air Force Base, *The First Seventy-Five Years*, (n.p., 1992).

³ Brooks Air Force Base, *Commemorative Program, Pride in the Past, Faith in the Future – Brooks Air Force Base, 1917-1992*, (San Antonio Press, 1992), p. 9.

⁴ Freeman, "Historic Context," L-23.

⁵ *Commemorative Program*, 1992.

⁶ Department of the Air Force, HQ, Washington DC to Chief of Engineers, Department of the Army, (June 5, 1952), Edward H. White II Museum of Aerospace Medicine in Hangar 9 at Brooks City-Base.

⁷ Department of the Air Force HQ to Chief of Engineers, Department of the Army, Revision of "Advance Planning FY53" Document. Various Minor Changes, (June 12, 1952), Edward H. White II Museum of Aerospace Medicine in Hangar 9 at Brooks City-Base.

⁸ George Schafer. Oral History Interview by HHM, Inc. December 6, 2002.

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1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Brooks Air Force Base, *Commemorative Program, Pride in the Past, Faith in the Future*, Brooks Air Force Base, 1917-1992. San Antonio Press, 1992.

Brooks Air Force Base, *The First Seventy-Five Years*. N.p., 1992. Edward H. White II Museum of Aerospace Medicine in Hangar 9 at Brooks City-Base.

"Department of the Air Force HQ, Washington DC to Chief of Engineers, Department of the Army." June 5, 1952. Edward H. White II Museum of Aerospace Medicine in Hangar 9 at Brooks City-Base.

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“Department of the Air Force HQ to Chief of Engineers, Department of the Army,
Revision of ‘Advance Planning FY53’ Document. Various Minor Changes.”
June 12, 1952. Edward H. White II Museum of Aerospace Medicine in Hangar 9
at Brooks City-Base.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Freeman, Martha. “Appendix L: Historic Context: Brooks Air Force Base, An
American Flying Field, 1917-46.” Geo-Marine, Inc., Plano, Texas, 1995.

E. Likely sources not yet investigated: The archives at the Edward H. White II Museum of Aerospace Medicine in Hangar 9 at Brooks City-Base contain a wealth of documentation that merits further exploration.

F. Supplemental Materials:

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFB	Air Force Base
AFRL	Air Force Research Laboratory
AMC	Aerospace Medical Center
AMD	Aerospace Medical Division
AMRL	Aerospace Medical Research Laboratory
ARL	Aeromedical Research Laboratory
BDA	Brooks Development Authority
BHF	Brooks Heritage Foundation
BRAC	Base Realignment and Closure
DOD	Department of Defense
HSD	Human Systems Division
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
MISS	Man in Space Soonest
MOA	Memorandum of Agreement
MOL	Manned Orbiting Laboratory
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NPS	National Park Service
SACS	San Antonio Conservation Society
SAM	School of Aviation (Aerospace) Medicine
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office
USAFSAM	U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine
WAC	Womens Air Corps

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

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A. Federal Agency:
Air Force
311th Human Systems Wing
Brooks City-Base
San Antonio, Texas.

B. Project Causing Adverse Effect: The Brooks City-Base project is a cooperative partnership between the Air Force and the non-federal community in which the physical assets of the former Brooks AFB have been transferred from the Air Force to BDA, a local municipality under Texas statute. Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, and its enabling regulations 36 CFR 800, the transfer of Federal property is an adverse effect that must be mitigated via a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the lead federal agency, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and other consulting parties invited to participate in the consultation.

In consultation with the Texas SHPO, the Air Force determined that seventeen buildings at Brooks City-Base were eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The Air Force developed an MOA in consultation with the Texas SHPO, City of San Antonio and BDA to mitigate the adverse impact that transfer would have on the seventeen historic properties at the former Brooks AFB. The MOA was also signed by two concurring parties, the San Antonio Conservation Society (SACS) and the Brooks Heritage Foundation (BHF). The MOA stipulated multiple measures, including preparation of a Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) Level II documentation report. The Air Force, through the 311th Human Systems Wing, hired Earth Tech, Inc. to oversee the preparation of HABS documentation. Under contract to Earth Tech, HHM Inc. of Austin, Texas, gathered historical and architectural information and prepared a historic context and the HABS forms.

The following individuals contributed to this report:

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