

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Houston Light Guard Armory
Other name/site number: Buffalo Soldiers National Museum
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 3820 Caroline Street
City or town: Houston State: Texas County: Harris
Not for publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:
☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Mark Wolfe State Historic Preservation Officer 11/29/23
Signature of certifying official / title Date
Texas Historical Commission
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other, explain: _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Houston Light Guard Armory, Harris County, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: DEFENSE: armory

Current Functions: RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification: LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS: Neo-Gothic Revival, Jacobean Revival

Principal Exterior Materials: BRICK, CONCRETE: cast stone

Narrative Description (see pages 7-12)

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	C	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
<input type="checkbox"/>	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: MILITARY, ARCHITECTURE (*local level of significance*)

Period of Significance: 1925-1974

Significant Dates: 1925, 1939

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): NA

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): NA

Architect/Builder: Alfred Charles Finn (architect), G. C. Street Construction Company (builder)

Narrative Statement of Significance (see pages 13-22)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see pages 23-24)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

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10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property: 0.571 acres

Coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 29.736017° Longitude: -95.378114°

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundary is that of the current and historic legal parcel of the nominated building: Harris County Appraisal District account 0120730000019, with the legal description: "LTS 1, 2, & 12 & TR 3A BLK 9 EMPIRE."

Boundary Justification: The boundary encompasses the historic parcel boundary, which remains the same as when the Houston Light Guards purchased the property in 1924.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Kristina Kupferschmid, Architectural Historian
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Date: June 12, 2023

Additional Documentation

Maps Maps (see pages 25-26)

Additional items Figures (see pages 27-40)

Photographs Photographs (see pages 41-61)

This project was funded in part through a grant from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, as administered by the Texas Historical Commission. The contents and opinions, however, do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior. This program receives Federal funds from the National Park Service. Regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination in departmental Federally Assisted Programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, age or handicap. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility operated by a recipient of Federal assistance should write to: Director, Equal Opportunity Program, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Photograph Log

Photographs reflect the current appearance of the nominated property.

Houston Light Guard Armory
Houston, Harris County, Texas
Photographed October 2023 by Gregory Smith (THC)

Photo 1 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0001)
Front southeast façade. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 2 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0002)
Oblique of front southeast and side northeast façades. Camera facing south.

Photo 3 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0003)
Side northeast façade. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 4 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0004)
Current primary entrance into museum on the side northeast façade. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 5 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0005)
Lawn with commemorative objects and walkway at the side northeast façade. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 6 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0006)
Bell and cornerstone from Mallalieu United Methodist Church in the lawn at the side northeast façade. Camera facing north.

Photo 7 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0007)
Sidewalk and lawn along Caroline Street at the front southeast façade. Note the low brick column at the corner of the building. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 8 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0008)
The inset balcony above the historic primary entrance on the southeast façade. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 9 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0009)
Oblique of the front southeast and side southwest façades. Camera facing north.

Photo 10 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0010)
Oblique of the side southwest and rear northwest façades. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 11 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0011)
Side northeast façade and rear of the front wing. Camera facing southeast.

Photo 12 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0012)
Rear northwest façade. Camera facing southeast.

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Photo 13 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0013)

Interior stairwell within the stairwell ell on the side southwest façade. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 14 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0014)

Reconfigured space on the ground floor for museum use. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 15 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0015)

Reconfigured space on the ground floor showing entrance lobby and ramp to lower office and library space. Camera facing northeast.

Photo 16 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0016)

Former club room with historic fireplace on first floor of front wing, south of the historic-period entrance lobby. Camera facing southeast

Photo 17 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0017)

Original sliding pocket door in former south club room opening to front wing historic-period entrance lobby. Camera facing north

Photo18 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0018)

Terrazzo stairs leading from historic-period entrance lobby of front wing to the drill hall. Camera facing northwest.

Photo 19 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0019)

Second floor of front wing. Camera facing southwest.

Photo 20 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0020)

Drill hall showing the additions at the corners and part of the balcony. Camera facing south.

Photo 21 (TX_HarrisCounty_HoustonLightGuardArmory_0021)

Stage on the northwest wall of the drill hall, from balcony. Camera facing northwest.

This project was funded through an Emergency Supplemental Historic Preservation Fund grant from the National Park Service that addresses damage inflicted by Hurricane Harvey. In January 2020, NPS staff concurred that this property is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Houston Light Guard Armory, Harris County, Texas

Narrative Description

The 1925 Houston Light Guard Armory¹ building is in central Houston, Harris County, Texas (Map 1). Two-and-a-half stories tall, the freestanding building has a T-plan footprint and is clad in brick with cast stone ornamentation and detailing (Photos 1 and 2).² Designed in the Neo-Gothic and Jacobean Revival styles by architect Alfred Charles Finn, the building is distinguished by its projecting central entrance, balconies, segmental-arched windows, buttresses, and decorative panels and medallions. The interior retains many notable rooms, materials, and architectural and ornamental features, including the historic drill hall – a large, two-story open room with a balcony. In 2007, the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum acquired and rehabilitated the building for their museum. The rehabilitation met the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, preserving the armory’s architectural integrity.

Setting and Site

The Houston Light Guard Armory (HLGA) building is in the Midtown neighborhood in central Houston. Bounded to the east and south by Interstate Highway 69 and separated from downtown Houston to the northeast by Interstate Highway 45, Midtown has a square-grid street network – a continuation from downtown Houston. The area is characterized by a mixture of commercial, institutional, religious, educational, and residential buildings. Originally developed in the late nineteenth century as a residential neighborhood, decades of redevelopment and commercial and interstate encroachment transformed Midtown, resulting in buildings of diverse ages and types in the area today.

The armory is in south-central Midtown, four blocks west of Interstate Highway 69 and five blocks north of Southwest Freeway (also Interstate Highway 69). An undeveloped lot currently used for surface parking is directly south of the building on Truxillo Street. Beyond, to the south and southeast, is predominantly residential with tree-lined streets. Much of Midtown’s larger, mixed-use development is non-historic age and west, southwest, and north of the HLGA, on and near Main Street, one of the neighborhood’s primary commercial corridors. Across Alabama Street, the Houston Community College Central Campus occupies much of the area northeast of the building. The Houston Community College Police Department building is directly east of the HLGA, across Caroline Street. Within the block bounded by Caroline, Truxillo, San Jacinto, and Alabama Streets, the armory occupies the southeast corner parcel. Two surface parking lots (one associated with the museum to the northeast and one to the northwest) and a gasoline station (to the north) occupy separate parcels within the block (Figure 2).

The armory lot is rectangular, and the building footprint—roughly 90 feet by 178 feet—occupies most of the parcel, leaving little room for landscaping (Map 2). The building is oriented to the southeast with the primary façade facing Caroline Street. During the rehabilitation, the building’s primary entrance shifted from the southeast façade to the northeast façade (Photos 3 and 4). Here, at the north side of the property, the museum rehabilitation project enclosed the small lawn with a metal fence and added walkways connecting to the parking lot and Caroline Street (Photo 5). The museum also added several objects, including a wagon, a horse sculpture, a monument commemorating Black soldiers, two flagpoles, and the bell and cornerstone from Mallalieu United Methodist Church, a Black church in Houston’s First Ward that was demolished in 2015 (Photo 6). On its street-facing sides—its southeast and southwest façades—the armory is set back slightly, between 20 to 30 feet, from Caroline and Truxillo Streets. A small sliver of lawn between the building and the sidewalks wraps around the armory along these façades (Photo 7). On the lawn facing Caroline Street, a low brick pier is topped with what may possibly be the cornerstone from the Houston Light Guard Armory’s first building. Finn’s

¹ The nominated building is referenced throughout this text as “the building” and “the armory,” even though the building no longer functions as an armory.

² In the text, the building’s floor levels are referenced as: the “ground floor” extends throughout the building, with lower ceilings in the front wing; the “first floor” is above the ground floor with varying heights in the front club-room wing and the rear drill-hall; the “second floor” is confined to the front wing.

Houston Light Guard Armory, Harris County, Texas

drawing identifies the pier as part of a larger “brick retaining wall” that wrapped around Caroline Street to Truxillo Street.³ Though Finn depicts a low wall in his drawings, photographs from the 1930s show the lawn as it is today, with the extant brick pier and no wall. South of the pier, a pole sign identifies the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum. A paved driveway accessed via Truxillo Street is directly behind (west) the armory.

Architectural Description

Exterior

The Houston Light Guard Armory is a reinforced-concrete two-and-a-half-story building that contains around 22,000 square feet.⁴ The T-plan building is comprised of two sections: a smaller front wing, the arm of the T, and the longer perpendicular section, its stem (see Figure 2). The building has a concrete and masonry veneer. A base of rough concrete wraps around the building’s ground level, and the upper stories are clad in red brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern. Cast stone is used throughout for window trim and sills, belt courses, cornices, coping, and other ornamentation. Windows throughout are wood- and steel-sash. A parapet with coping wraps around the roof. The armory has one external brick chimney—on the northeast façade—with decorative panels, stepped cast-stone detailing, and coping that defines its crown cap. Buttresses, inspired by Gothic church construction, support the open, high-roof interior space. Other character-defining features include stylized balconies, buttresses, segmental-arched entrance openings and windows, pointed arch openings, and decorative panels and medallions. The building’s form, arrangement, and ornamentation distinguish its Neo-Gothic and Jacobean style. The design, borrowed from defensive and medieval architecture, imbues the armory’s purpose.

The façades in each section of the building are architecturally similar in organization and design, and each is described in detail.

Front Wing

The flat-roof front wing of the building is oriented northeast-by-southwest and is roughly 28 feet long and 90 feet wide. The wing is smaller and has a slightly lower profile than the rear. This wing was designed to accommodate two stories on the interior and more formal spaces; on the exterior, the window and floor plates reflect this interior arrangement. The ground-level concrete base is taller on the front wing than on the rest of the building stem and has a cast stone top band. The ground floor originally had inset openings with hopper windows; these openings remain, but with four-pane metal casement replacement windows (Figure 4). The date of this alteration is not known. The front wing has two belt courses of brick headers—one below the first-story windows and one below the second-story windows—that wrap around its façades. The projecting cast-stone cornice separates the second floor from the parapet and distinguishes the front wing from the rest of the building. Decorative elements include cast-stone panels of the Texas Lone Star above ground level at the corners of the southeast façade, small squares between the first and second stories on the side façades, and square panels with shields in the parapet on the side and front façades.

The southeast façade is the building’s primary façade. Symmetrical in arrangement and divided into three bays, the southeast façade has a central entrance bay that projects about seven feet away from the wing. Brick buttresses with sloped, cast-stone stepped tops frame the historic-period primary entrance, centered on the first floor with a second-story inset balcony above, all of which project slightly from the buttresses. The bay’s striped pattern of contrasting brick and cast stone is reminiscent of red- and white-striped Italian Gothic churches and the masterful 1903 Neo-Byzantine Westminster Cathedral in England. The armory entrance is recessed within a Neo-Gothic-style pointed arch opening with

³ Finn’s original drawings are located at the Houston Public Library, Metropolitan Research Center. Due to the quality of the reproductions, copies of the original drawings are not included in this nomination.

⁴ Harris County Appraisal District records the building area as 20,690 square feet in 2023, while architectural drawings from 2016 note it as 22,265 square feet.

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a keystone in the center of the façade. Brick stairs from the sidewalk lead to the entrance, a multiple-light double door with a pointed-arch multiple-light transom. The three-bay recessed balcony above the entrance has a projecting central bay, tile floor, and three multiple-light wood doors with transoms that open to the second floor. The balcony's decorative closed railing has cast-stone reliefs of guardsmen and is inscribed with "Houston Light Guard Armory," "1873," the company's founding date, and "1925" – the building's construction date (Photo 8). Narrow, recessed, vertical windows flank the first-floor opening, and protruding, elongated, decorative vertical cast-stone spears, resembling narrow arrow slits used for defense in medieval castle architecture, flank the balcony above. A cast-stone belt course is atop the balcony where an ornamental cast-iron molded shoe secures a metal flagpole. The brick parapet in the center bay has two horizontal cast-stone panels – the longer, lower one decorated with flowers. On either side of these and extending upward from the protruding spears are vertical concave cast-stone panels decorated with shields that extend slightly above the roof.

The plainer outer bays of the primary façade also reflect Neo-Gothic themes. The side bays on the primary façade have a rusticated concrete exterior at ground level with brick veneer above. Fenestration is composed of wood-frame and -sash casement windows with cast-stone sills. Each side bay has a tripartite segmental-arched window with quoins on the first level; these windows have 16 lights with 8-light transoms. Cast-stone vertical spears integrated between the ground-floor windows emulate those flanking the central balcony. The second level of each side bay has a row of five rectangular windows; four of these have 16-lights with 4-light transoms. The shorter central window has 8 lights with a 4-light transom and, under each, is a cast-stone panel with the Houston Light Guard Armory crest.

The design treatment and organization of the two bays flanking the center bay are similar on the northeast and southwest side façades, as well as the rear northwest façade of the front wing (Photo 9). The side and rear façades also have a concrete ground-floor exterior with brick above. The fenestration pattern and detailing, however, differ somewhat. The sides only have rectangular window openings, with slightly different fenestration patterns on the northeast side versus the southwest. On the first floor, both sides have a pattern of two windows with an expanse of wall between them to accommodate an interior fireplace. On the second floor, the northeast side has a row of three windows, and the southwest side has only two windows with an expanse of brick in between, similarly accommodating a chimney for an interior fireplace. The wood-casement windows replicate those on the front façade; here, though, the first-floor transoms are flat. The original narrow, inset bent openings on the ground floor remain intact. The rear façade has an irregular fenestration that reflects the interior functions. The fenestration configuration remains unchanged on this wing, except for the rear façade. During the rehabilitation, on the north side of the rear façade, the current first-story window replaced an original shorter and wider six-light window and, on the second story, the window next to the chimney replaced a door that historically led to a fire escape. In the rehabilitation, the opening, which was missing a door at the time, was infilled at the bottom and replaced with the current casement window.

Perpendicular Section

This section of the building is the largest: roughly 150 feet long by 63 feet wide. Oriented northwest-by-southeast—perpendicular to the front wing—this section is slightly taller than the front wing. Designed to accommodate a large, open space with high interior ceilings, its exterior features—buttresses, window heights, and roof profile—reflect this purpose. Because of the height difference and function of this section, the floor plates do not align with the front wing.

Organization and design elements of this section's two sides—the northeast and southwest façades—are similar, though variations distinguish the two (compare Photos 10 and 3). Both façades are divided into seven bays separated by brick buttresses with decorative cast-stone projections and tops. The westernmost bays are slightly shorter than the rest of the section and are inset several feet from the rest of the façade. The rough concrete base rises to the same height on both side façades, though a cast-stone band only tops the base on the southwest façade. Brick veneer covers the remainder of the exterior walls. The ground floor bays contain a combination of windows and doors. Ground-floor, steel-sash windows are inset and have sloping cast-stone sills. The southwest façade windows have cast-stone lintels that extend the length of the façade, and the northeast façade windows have brick lintels that extend to the length of the façade. Doors on the ground

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floor are both single- and double-width and have multiple-light transoms. The southwest ground floor fenestration configuration remains mostly unaltered, though the original, and only historic-age southwest façade entrance—a double door with transom—was replaced with a single door with one sidelight during the rehabilitation; the alteration retained the original opening size. Also on the southwest façade, a historic-period window in the second bay from the east on the ground floor was reconfigured to a single-door opening during the rehabilitation. On the northeast façade, a double door with a transom replaced the two original windows in the bay second from the east, creating a new primary entrance into the museum. A new canopy with the museum's name was added to the entrance. During the rehabilitation, a new double door with a transom replaced the original rolling door in the third bay from the east on the ground floor of the northeast façade. The upper stories on the southwest and northeast façades are defined by their large, one-and-a-half story, multiple-light steel-sash windows with pivoted, reversible middle sections and cast-stone sills. In the middle five bays on both façades, the windows in the third and fifth bays from the east have balconies. Supported by cast stone brackets, the balconies have low, open, brick railings and are adorned with cast-stone shields (Photo 11). Four-light hinged casement doors with four-light sidelights open onto the balconies. As originally built, the easternmost bay on the northeast façade had a small door opening with a fire escape and stairs. This opening was mostly bricked in, and a small window at the top was added during the rehabilitation. This window is similar to the original extant window in the easternmost bay on the south façade. The westernmost bays on both façades have no fenestration. A cast stone belt course runs across the length of both façades at the height of the windows. Parapets on both sides have decorative cast-stone medallions with militaristic motifs, and the cast-stone coping has overflow slots in line with the buttresses. The parapet on this section mostly conceals the pent-up roof and the line of raised vents that extend down its middle.

An enclosed stairwell projects from the intersection of the southwest façade of the perpendicular wing with the rear of the front wing, rising two stories with a flat roof, measuring roughly 9 feet by 24 feet. This wing projects past the side façade of the front wing and reaches the sidewalk on Truxillo Street. This enclosure has a single door with a sidelight and a quoin surround topped with a decorative panel. The second story of this enclosure has a narrow steel-sash window with a segmental-arched lintel. The upper corners of the wing are chamfered and embellished with geometrically stylized cast stone.

The rear façade has three bays, separated by brick buttresses with sloping cast-stone caps (Photo 12). Steel-sash windows are in all ground-floor bays and the two end bays on the upper stories. Smaller awning windows are above the ground-floor windows and the second-story windows. The ground floor windows are inset with sloping cast-stone sills; all others have flush cast-stone sills. A brick header belt course is atop the ground-floor windows, the awning windows above have brick lintels, and a cast-stone belt course is above the second-story awning windows. The rear façade has a sloped parapet with coping and overflow slots. Embellishments are minimal on the rear façade, limited to a square cast-stone panel in the parapet adorned with a shield.

Interior

The interior configuration and organization of the HLGA are similar to other armories of the period with a variety of public and private spaces. Although some spaces were reconfigured and refinished in the rehabilitation to suit the museum's needs, the overall layout and many significant interior spaces and finishes remain unchanged from the historic period. Another notable feature that remains is different floor plates in the front and rear sections. This results in floor levels that do not align and require stairwells to connect the two sections. Historic-period stairwells—one at the northwest corner of the building, one in the front wing, and one in the stairwell wing at the southeast side of the building—remain intact and provide access between the floors (Photo 13). The museum added an elevator at the northeast corner, next to the chimney, which connects each floor.

Ground Floor

The ground floor extends across the building's footprint. As originally built, the ceiling levels at the front wing were too low to accommodate usable space. Finn's floor plan shows the ground-floor front wing mostly separated from the rest of this level with a wall and an unfished dirt floor. In the perpendicular rear wing, the ground floor is the primary public

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space and museum for the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum and was retrofitted accordingly. Historically, this level had a large locker room with showers and toilets, classrooms, offices, a vault, a supply room, a kitchen, a boiler room, and other mechanical systems. During the rehabilitation, walls were added, moved, and removed in various places to create classrooms, exhibit rooms, meeting rooms, bathrooms, a gift shop, and an entry lobby. On the ground floor of the front wing, lower than the rest of the ground floor, offices, a library, a work room, and a gallery hall were added to this front space. A threshold ramp was added to access this area (Photos 14 and 15).

Front Wing

The layout and finishes on the first floor of the front wing remain largely unchanged from the period of significance. From the historic-period primary entrance hall, the former veterans' club room to the south and the general club room to the north are used for exhibits and offices. These rooms retain their original wood sliding pocket doors and fireplaces with tiled hearths and mantels (Photos 16 and 17). The first floor of the front wing retains its original terrazzo flooring with tile trim. Original plaster walls have oak chair rails and picture molding, and the ceilings remain plastered. A terrazzo-floor staircase in the entrance hall has original oak railings, painted metal balusters, and new molded horsehead newel posts. The stairs lead to a landing that opens to the drill hall and another stairwell that leads to the second floor of the front wing (Photo 18).

The second floor of the front wing was reconfigured during the rehabilitation. Originally divided into multiple rooms—living room, kitchen, en suite bedroom, ladies' room with bathroom, radio room, lounge room, surgeon's office, executive office, instructor's office, closets, regimental headquarters, and projector booth—this level is now mostly one open room (Photo 19). Many walls were removed to create an open bar and an exhibit area, and walls were reconfigured at the north end to create new offices and a storage room. Floors are finished in concrete as they were historically. Walls remain plaster, though the original wood chair rail and picture molding are not extant. Originally finished with plaster, the ceiling on this level was dropped and acoustic tile was added.

Drill Hall

The former drill hall remains a large open one-and-a-half-story-tall room. A mezzanine balcony on the southeast wall with a wood railing—attached to the ceiling with metal supporting rods—historically overlooked and extended across the width of the hall (Figure 5). The middle portion of the balcony remains with a new metal railing, however, either end of the balcony was removed for construction of the two one-and-a-half story enclosures—housing bathrooms and storage—at the northeast and southeast corners (Photo 20). These enclosures created a new lobby at the stairway landing and into the hall. A new set of stairs connecting to the front wing's second floor was also added to the south wall. The rest of the hall remains largely unchanged. New wood flooring was laid during the rehabilitation, replacing original deteriorated and damaged wood flooring. The walls are finished with the original tan and brown brick and have a dark brown brick trim and a red cast-stone tile belt course with blue diamond details above the windows. The historic-period stage is in the center of the northwest wall (Figure 6 and Photo 21). Stepped brick pilasters flank the stage opening with a row of miniature stepped-brick pilasters atop. Two single doors on either side of the stage were added during the rehabilitation when the one-and-a-half-story openings were enclosed. The double-door openings at the south and north corners of the wall are original. The metal roof truss was and remains exposed. Ductwork, added during the rehabilitation, is along the ceiling and enters into the hall via historic period round medallions, converted to openings, on the west wall.

Integrity

The exterior and interior of the HLGA present much the same as they did in 1925. The building retains integrity of location, and its design, form, plan, massing, materials, workmanship, and Neo-Gothic and Jacobean ornamentation and stylistic influences have changed little since the period of significance. Important interior spaces, including the open-floor drill hall, stage, and entrance hall with adjacent rooms, remain mostly unchanged, and many of the original interior finishes—terrazzo floors, brick walls, wood trim—in these spaces are extant. Though changes to the surrounding area

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impact the integrity of setting, the preservation of the building's character-defining features and design elements contribute to its high degree of integrity of association and feeling.

While most of the changes to the building occurred after the period of significance, these alterations allowed for the building's continued use and preservation. Unoccupied for years, the building was in a state of disrepair and deterioration when acquired by the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum. Hurricanes, including Alicia in 1983 and Ike in 2008, exacerbated the deterioration caused by deferred maintenance and neglect. By the 1980s, the armory did not meet building and electrical codes, and photographs from 2004 through 2010 document the building's poor condition (Figures 7–11). The windows and doors were boarded, and some windows were missing. The exterior brick walls were cracked and separated in multiple places. On the interior, the plaster walls and ceilings had mold, and the brick walls had efflorescence. In the drill hall, the wood floor was damaged and missing boards in places. Despite desires to rehabilitate the armory, lack of funding prevented previous owners from completing any substantial work. When the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum acquired the building, the organization intended to use it as its exhibition hall and preserve the building. Because the armory was designated as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark in 1992, the rehabilitation was conducted according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, with plans reviewed by the Texas Historical Commission. The rehabilitation addressed issues of deterioration and disrepair and helped weatherize the building. Salvageable features and materials, including windows, doors, and woodwork, were repaired and refinished (and only replaced when missing, like windows and doors, or deteriorated beyond repair, like the drill hall floor). Structural work repaired cracks and stabilized the building. Other changes to modernize and retrofit the building into a museum included the reconfiguration of interior layouts—particularly on the ground floor—and the bathroom and storage additions in the drill hall. The relocation of the primary entrance into the building, from the east façade to the north façade, left the historic-period east entrance intact but did require some alterations to the north façade's fenestration.

More recently, a rehabilitation project funded in part with a grant from the National Park Service is addressing damage caused by Hurricane Harvey in 2017. Despite weatherizing in 2010, this storm damaged the building's parapets, windows, doors, and cast stone and brick materials. The grant is funding weatherproofing and engineering studies. Additional work funded outside the grant is focused on structural and exterior repairs, including window repairs. All work meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

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Statement of Significance

The Houston Light Guard Armory was completed in 1925 for the Houston Light Guards, a volunteer unit of the National Guard. The armory was the second home to the Houston Light Guards, which organized in 1873 as a state-sponsored militia. The building near downtown Houston was both an armory and social center for the company and was occupied by the National Guard until the 1990s. The building derives significance from its association with the military history and organizational evolution of the Houston Light Guards and the National Guard and is nominated under Criterion A in the area of Military History at the local level. The building is also nominated under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the local level as an excellent example of a distinct building type—a pre-World War II armory—and as an important work of Houston architect Alfred C. Finn. The building is his only armory project and a rare Gothic- and Jacobean-inspired design in Finn's extensive catalog. The period of significance for the armory begins in 1925 and extends to 1974, 50 years ago prior to the anticipated listing date.

Criterion A: Military

The 1925 armory, the lone extant building associated with the Houston Light Guards (HLG), is significant for its association with military history. The (HLG) was a volunteer militia company organized in Houston in 1873. Their history is part of the larger history and evolution of militias and the National Guard in Texas. Organized as a volunteer militia, then a state-sponsored militia, and lastly part of the National Guard, the HLG maintained a military responsibility to defend and support their local community, the state, and the nation during its history.

Overview of the Militia and National Guard in Texas

In Texas, militia groups date back to the early nineteenth century when the first permanent White settlers arrived. Under the Republic of Texas, from 1836 to 1845, a universal militia supplemented Texas army and ranger companies, and volunteer militia units organized in many commercial centers to provide a form of local law enforcement.⁵ Comprised of anywhere from 30 to 100 civilian men between the ages of 17 to 50, militia members provided their own supplies and equipment and received an ammunition allowance from the Republic.⁶ Chartered by the Texas Congress, contemporaneous militias acted as local police forces, frontier and port guards, and escort units to the Texas army.⁷

When Texas joined the United States in 1845, the country's Militia Act of 1792 was the main source of guidance for militia organizations. Under this act, however, the federal government offered little support or instruction, leaving states in charge of legislating their militias. In Texas, militia companies continued to organize during this period, with many volunteering to fight in the Mexican War between 1846 and 1848. By 1858, volunteer militia companies were in Galveston, San Antonio, Milam, Refugio, and Houston. As the militia's role in defense declined after statehood—with the U.S. Army assuming control along the Mexican border and the Texas Rangers maintaining the interior—the legislature cut militia funding, limiting the role of most militias to local protection.⁸ During the Civil War, some volunteer militia companies disbanded so that members could join the Confederate army, and others mustered into Confederate forces. With most men between the ages of 18 to 45 conscripted into service, remnant Texas militias consisted mostly of older

⁵ Bruce A. Olson, "Texas National Guard," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed January 04, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/texas-national-guard>.

⁶ Olson, "Texas National Guard," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁷ Olson, "Texas National Guard," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

⁸ Olson, "Texas National Guard," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

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men tasked with defending its frontier against Native American or Mexican forces and a potential Union invasion along the Gulf Coast.⁹

Following the Civil War, American lawmakers passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867. As part of the law, militias in the former Confederate states, including Texas, were disbanded and prohibited from organizing. The act also placed Texas under military law until 1870, when it was readmitted to the Union following Congress's approval of a new state constitution. That year, Congress reversed its ban on militias in the former Confederate states due to budget shortages and a loss of manpower that limited the army's ability to defend the country and police the southern states.¹⁰ Texas's Republican governor, Edmund Davis, a southern Unionist and supporter of the rights of freedmen, and the state legislature enacted the Militia Law shortly thereafter, allowing the formation of the racially-integrated State Police, the State Guard, and a Reserve Militia under the adjutant general. The State Police were charged with protecting citizens and property, establishing law and order, and maintaining peace throughout the state. The State Guard and the Reserve Militia were primarily charged with defending against foreign invasion but also augmented the state, county, or local police in the event of civil disorder or disaster. All men ages 18 to 45 who volunteered and uniformed themselves formed the State Guard. Those liable for military service but not enrolled in the State Guard became part of the Reserve Militia. These units were required to hold an annual muster and enrollment at county courthouses.¹¹ When the exclusively White Democratic party—known for its opposition to Reconstruction and integration of the Black population into political, social, and cultural systems—gained political power in 1872, they merged the State Guard and Reserve Militia into a "Uniformed Militia," or the Texas Volunteer Guard, and segregated the units.¹² Many of the white units that formed after this restructuring considered themselves "redeemers of honest and moral white rule in Texas," comprised of men who supported the Democrats' rule and considered the use of militia force to support Reconstruction efforts tyrannical.¹³ "Redeemers," as they considered themselves, were opposed to Reconstruction and racial equality. In this atmosphere, the Houston Light Guards organized in 1873.

After 1873, the militia in Texas was restructured and reorganized many times, though its responsibilities remained much the same: to defend against foreign invasions, suppress insurrections, keep the peace, and carry out the laws of the land. The units of the Texas Volunteer Guard carried out these duties throughout the end of the nineteenth century—mobilizing for labor, race, and political conflicts; border tensions; and natural disasters including the 1900 Galveston hurricane—until 1903 following the federal passage of the Dick Act. The Dick Act created two reserve national forces: the National Guard and the Reserve Militia. Much like the organization of Texas's militias in the nineteenth century, the National Guard included enlisted militias, and the Reserve Militia included all male citizens between ages 18 and 45. Though units of the Texas Volunteer Guard remained under state control, the reorganization allotted some federal funding and tasked militias with federal obligations, in addition to their state and local obligations. With further restructuring, the militia became more professional and militaristic in the twentieth century. The Defense Act of 1916 increased federal oversight and pay for state militias and gave the President authority to mobilize the National Guard in times of war and emergencies; an amendment to the act passed in 1933 placed all National Guard units under the purview of the U.S. Army. During World War I, National Guard units in Texas organized with units from Oklahoma to form the 36th Infantry Division. The sixth largest state militia in the country, the division's roughly 7,500 men fought in France during World War I. During World War II, the division served in the Pacific, African, and European theaters.¹⁴ Between the wars, the National Guard

⁹ Olson, "Texas National Guard," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

¹⁰ Olson, "Texas National Guard," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

¹¹ Bruce Allan Olson, "The Houston Light Guards: Elite cohesion and social order in the New South, 1873-1940," Ph. D. diss., (University of Houston, 1989), 7.

¹² Olson, "Texas National Guard," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

¹³ Olson, "The Houston Light Guards," 1.

¹⁴ Joseph G. Dawson III, "Thirty-Sixth Infantry Division," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed January 06, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/thirty-sixth-infantry-division>.

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suppressed racial and labor conflicts in the state, but growing federalization and strengthened militarization, along with expanding city police forces and the creation of the Texas Department of Public Safety in 1935, limited the role of the militia in local law and order over time. Texas National Guard units mobilized minimally during the Korean War and Vietnam War, with only one unit called up for the latter conflict.¹⁵

The Houston Light Guards

The Houston Light Guards organized in 1873, shortly after the ban on militias was lifted and as Democrats gained political power in Texas. The unit organized under a City of Houston charter and, after completing a petition requesting state approval, their charter was filed at the Texas Capitol in Austin. The unit was one of the first volunteer companies in Texas and the first in post-Reconstruction Houston.¹⁶ The function and reorganization of the HLG throughout its history reflect the evolution of the militia in Texas. In their first several decades, the HLG was used primarily for crowd control and maintaining peace. One of the unit's first calls to duty was in Calvert, Texas, where it helped settled a dispute peacefully between several communities that had imposed a blockade on goods from Calvert due to a yellow fever outbreak.¹⁷ The unit helped local authorities—comprised of White men—suppress labor strikes and Black uprisings in the 1870s and 1880s in Houston and nearby Matagorda County.¹⁸ The unit was part of the larger response following the Galveston Hurricane, working relief efforts with other state militia groups for 19 days.¹⁹ The militia responded to President William McKinley's call for volunteers in the Spanish-American War in 1898. Offering their "unconditional services" to the U.S. Army, despite a provision in their charter exempting them from military service outside Harris County, the HLG, without state or federal funds, sent men to Cuba.²⁰

Parading and participating in drill competitions across the South comprised a large portion of the early history of the HLG (Figure 12). The group won its first prize in Austin at the Capital State Fair in 1875 and, by the time the group retired from competition in 1889, the HLG had earned a reputation as one of the South's premier military drill units.²¹ Some resources say they were barred from participating after 1889 due to their dominance. During this time, the unit won around \$30,000 in cash prizes, plus an additional \$10,000 in goods, including flags, trophies, and medals.²² The HLG used winnings to help pay expenses for uniforms, balls and galas, and building expenses like rent, and later construction, since they received no government funding for these expenses.

In the twentieth century, following increased federal government oversight and responsibilities, the HLG participated in more military missions. Between 1913 and 1916, President Wilson activated the HLG, deploying them to the Rio Grande Valley to defend citizens and property during the Mexican Revolution. During World War I, the HLG trained at Camp Bowie before deploying to Europe. During the war, 54 HLG members served as officers in a variety of positions, most in infantry units, though some joined British forces before America's entrance into war. Roughly another 200 HLG members fought on the front lines in the Meuse-Argonne campaign in France as part of Company G, 143rd Infantry Regiment, 36th Division.²³ The unit is credited with confiscating "more than 100 German machine-guns and 300,00 rounds of machine-

¹⁵ Only one unit was called up during the Vietnam War.; Olson, "Texas National Guard," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

¹⁶ Bruce A. Olson, "Houston Light Guards," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed February 21, 2023, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/houston-light-guards>.

¹⁷ Olson, "The Houston Light Guards," 45.

¹⁸ Olson, "The Houston Light Guards," 185

¹⁹ Olson, "The Houston Light Guards," 199.

²⁰ Olson, "The Houston Light Guards," 263–265.

²¹ *Daily Court Review*, April 23, 1935, 4.

²² Olson, "Houston Light Guards," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

²³ Olson, "The Houston Light Guards," 334–336.

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gun ammunition...besides worlds of other property. This was one of their strong points,” according to one lieutenant.²⁴ Eight HLG members died during the war.²⁵

The interwar years were characteristically quiet for the HLG. During this period, the unit was active in restoring order in various parts of the state during several emergencies. The HLG provided storm relief in Nueces, San Patricio, and Aransas Counties and disaster relief following a gas-leak explosion in Rusk County.²⁶ Local law enforcement efforts were few during this period, as Houston’s police department grew larger in size, responsibility, and professionalism. Contemporaneous archival records and newspaper articles depict the unit and its members participating in athletic events, dances, parades, and other local ceremonial events.

In 1940, the HLG was again activated for duty during World War II. Before deploying, members reported daily to the unit’s armory to train.²⁷ In addition to marching drills, the unit practiced marksmanship with .22-caliber rifles at the armory’s small arms range (location unknown).²⁸ After a month of training, the unit went to Camp Bowie before deploying to Europe, where the HLG fought in Italy, France, Germany, and Austria as Company G, 143rd Infantry Regiment, 36th Division. This would be the last major military deployment for the HLG. Some members saw action during the Korean War, but Company G, 143rd Infantry Regiment was not called up during the Vietnam War. After World War II and the Korean War, continued merging and reorganization ultimately erased the HLGs as an exclusive and independent National Guard unit. Though it no longer exists as such, Company G of the 143rd Infantry Regiment commemorates its origins by wearing nineteenth-century HLG uniforms during some ceremonial occasions.²⁹

Membership Demographics

As an all-White company until the mid-twentieth century, the white supremacist origins and early history of the HLG cannot be overlooked. Between 1873 and World War I, HLG membership fluctuated between 36 to 230 men, with a typical annual average of around 70.³⁰ The only known non-White member during this period was John Sessums, Jr., a Black drummer with the unit in the 1870s and 1880s. The unit’s 36 original members were all Confederate veterans who saw the HLG as a means to assert their control in Houston and Harris County business and political matters.³¹ The HLG counted some of Houston’s most prominent citizens as members, including businessmen, two adjutant generals of Texas, two assistant adjutant generals, and seven Houston mayors.³² Early membership was by invitation only and included a number of men seeking a military title but who were too young to have served in the Civil War.³³ The early HLG members held “contemporary prejudices and a sense of duty primarily directed toward the advancement of elite values.”³⁴ Though the unit protected Black citizens when called to, their lack of concern for Black interests was evident in their support of political and business leaders that served their own interests. “The Light Guards’ function was simply to protect elite values and interests...they symbolized the concentrated might and legal right of the established social order.”³⁵

²⁴ Olson, “The Houston Light Guards,” 335.

²⁵ [TSHA | Houston Light Guards \(tshaonline.org\)](https://tshaonline.org); Olson, “The Houston Light Guards,” 334 – 336.

²⁶ Olson, “The Houston Light Guards,” 344.

²⁷ Olson, “The Houston Light Guards,” 351.

²⁸ Olson, “The Houston Light Guards,” 352.

²⁹ “143rd Infantry Regiment: Lineage and Honors,” Texas Military Forces Museum, accessed February 1, 2023, [Lineage and Honors - 143rd Infantry Regiment \(texasmilitaryforcesmuseum.org\)](https://texasmilitaryforcesmuseum.org).

³⁰ Olson, “The Houston Light Guards,” 418; The second lowest number was recorded in 1900 following the Spanish-American War, and the highest number was recorded in 1917, during World War I.

³¹ Olson, “The Houston Light Guards,” 38.

³² Charlotte Moser, Houston Public Library, “For Immediate Release,” March 7, 1973, from the Alfred C. Finn collection, Houston Public Library.

³³ “Houston Light Guard Armory,” City of Houston Protected Landmark Designation Report, September 22, 2006.

³⁴ Olson, “The Houston Light Guards,” 201.

³⁵ Olson, “The Houston Light Guards,” 201.

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Throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, membership in the HLG was comprised of members of Houston's White elite.

By the end of World War I, however, the socioeconomic makeup of the HLG began to change. Though it remained predominantly White, membership became mostly working-class men. Several factors caused this shift, forcing the HLG to change its membership standards. Membership in the HLG grew less attractive to the upper class due to the increased possibility of active duty. The creation of the Officers' Reserve Corps in 1916, considered a prestigious alternative to the local militia unit, was more likely to attract elites.³⁶ Lastly, by the mid-1930s, the militia was no longer the most effective way to protect elite interests. To maintain numbers, the HLG opened membership to men previously prohibited from joining. In addition to skilled workers, the HLG welcomed its first Hispanic members in the 1930s, with eight by 1940.³⁷ In the 1960s, the HLG welcomed the first Black members since Sessums.³⁸

The Houston Light Guard Armory Building

After renting space in the city for several years, the HLG built its first armory at 1016–1022 Texas Avenue in 1893 (demolished in 1931). The unit used prize money and issued a \$30,000 bond issue to fund the construction of the \$50,000 three-story building (Figure 13). The city's elite also donated money and sponsored a bazaar to raise funds for the construction of the armory, and the HLG further defrayed costs by leasing the ground floor to private commercial businesses. As the first permanent home for the HLG, the armory was a place for meeting, training, and socializing. The HLG hosted prominent Houstonians and Texans at social events, such as the annual ball where the organization feted guests "with all the pomp and ceremony of European royalty."³⁹

By 1924, the HLG needed a new armory. The downtown building was deteriorating and too small for the unit. Rather than repair the building, the HLG opted to sell and use the \$201,000 in proceeds to build a new armory. The HLG purchased a vacant lot at Caroline Street and Truxillo Avenue in Midtown for the armory, despite a petition eight people signed and sent to the city council to protest the location.⁴⁰ At that time, the surrounding area in Midtown was developed with the streets lined with single- and multiple-family dwellings, nearby churches, and schools (Figure 1). In 1924, a building committee comprised of HLG veterans selected Houston architect Alfred C. Finn to design the armory.⁴¹ The committee contributed design ideas to Finn and were insistent on having "an artistic exterior."⁴² Approving his design in early 1925, one committee member noted: "My hopes and aspirations for exterior design have been completely satisfied. The building is one which will be an asset to the city."⁴³ Bids for construction went out early in 1925, and the winning firm—bidding \$86,950—G. C. Street Construction Company of Houston began work in February.⁴⁴ Sourcing most of the materials, including the brick, from businesses in Houston, G. C. Street Construction completed the armory in less than a year. The official opening of the armory in January 1926 was celebrated with a dance, organized by several HLG committees including the music committee, reception committee, and the ladies' committee.⁴⁵

³⁶ Olson, "The Houston Light Guards," 342.

³⁷ Olson, "The Houston Light Guards," 342.

³⁸ John Sessums was the first HLG Black member. He was the unit drummer and something of a folk hero due to his percussion ability.

³⁹ Olson, "The Houston Light Guards," 119.

⁴⁰ "Protest Made as to Location of Armory," *Houston Post Dispatch*, December 2, 1924, 15.

⁴¹ T. G. C. A Monthly Bulletin, January 1925, 25.

⁴² "New Home of Houston Light Guard Will Be of Composite Design and Big Asset to City," *Houston Post Dispatch*, January 18, 1925, from the Alfred C. Finn Collection, Houston Public Library.

⁴³ "New Home of Houston Light Guard Will Be of Composite Design and Big Asset to City," *Houston Post Dispatch*, January 18, 1925, from the Alfred C. Finn Collection, Houston Public Library.

⁴⁴ T. G. C., *A Monthly Bulletin*, January 1925, 25.

⁴⁵ "Dance, Social Is Planned For Armory Event," *Houston Post Dispatch*, January 15, 1926, 8.

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Under the ownership of the HLG, the building was both an armory that the National Guard used for drill practice and meetings, and that the HLG veterans' association, which had organized in 1902, used for meeting and socializing. The veterans also displayed war relics like a sword presumed to have been at the Battle of San Jacinto.⁴⁶ The HLG and veterans held their anniversary banquet at the armory, regularly hosting more than 100 people at the annual event. The HLG also opened the armory to other organizations, including the Boy Scouts, who had scouts' courses in the building, and groups from the University of Houston, who held dances and concert programs there. The armory also hosted sporting events such as basketball games between teams from the National Guard, U.S. Naval Reserve, and Civilian Conservation Corps, as well as table tennis exhibitions.

The HLG owned the armory until 1939 when it deeded the property to the state. Denied multiple requests for tax exemption status, a reflection of the HLG's waning influence in local politics and government affairs, the organization owed more than \$30,000 in taxes to the state, county, and city by 1938.⁴⁷ Generating little outside income to pay increasing property taxes, the HLG opted to deed the property and building to the Texas Army National Guard, making it the first state-owned armory in Texas.⁴⁸ Under state ownership, the use and purpose of the armory remained much the same. The National Guard continued using the building as an armory, and the HLG veteran's association continued to meet there.

Though the National Guard maintained offices at the armory into the early 1990s, they used the building less and less after World War II. Diminishing use and a lack of property maintenance due to limited funds and hurricane damage left the building in need of more than \$850,000 of work by 1985.⁴⁹ In 1991, despite the National Guard's desire to renovate the building, without the required funding to do so, the State of Texas listed the armory for sale to the highest bidder, along with several other armories considered surplus, including Texas Panhandle properties in Borger and Shamrock.⁵⁰ A year later, in 1992, 18 National Guard armories in Texas closed in an effort to "trim fat and reorganize nationwide."⁵¹ Intending to repurpose the armory as a library, Houston Community College (HCC) purchased the building. A campus masterplan revealed that the armory was not large enough to house its proposed adaptive reuse as a library.⁵² As a result, the armory sat mostly vacant for a decade, used occasionally for storage by HCC. HCC deeded the property to the City of Houston, which entered into a lease with the Houston Hispanic Forum in 2001. The organization retained an architect and undertook a capital campaign to fund rehabilitation of the building for use as a cultural center. By 2007, though, plans had fallen through, and the City sold the building to the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum. Founded in 2001 by Vietnam veteran Paul Matthews, the museum, which commemorates Black military history, had outgrown its original building on Southmore Boulevard. The museum organization raised millions of dollars and rehabilitated the building. Holding the largest collection of African American military memorabilia in the world, the museum officially opened in the armory in 2012.⁵³ Among notable relics on display is John Sessums's drum.

Criterion C: Architecture

The HLGA is significant as a distinctive building type. Built before the Texas National Guard Armory Board had authority over the construction of National Guard armories and facilities, the building design was assigned to architect Alfred Finn and the HLG, which funded the construction.⁵⁴ Despite a lack of state or national oversight, the design of the

⁴⁶ "Sword Probably Used at San Jacinto Discovered," *The Galveston Daily News*, July 28, 1927, 2.

⁴⁷ Olson, "The Houston Light Guards," 344.

⁴⁸ Olson, "The Houston Light Guards," 344.

⁴⁹ T. E. Bell, "Lack of renovation funds may doom armory," *Houston Chronicle*, 1985.

⁵⁰ *The Galveston Daily News*, June 2, 1991, 30.

⁵¹ "Breckinridge armory 1 of 18 to close statewide," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, March 14, 1992, 23.

⁵² David K. Larrew, "Light Guard Armory: Central Library for Houston Community College System," Thesis, (University of Houston, 1993).

⁵³ "Museum pays homage to black soldiers," *Houston Chronicle*, November 12, 2017, A6.

⁵⁴ The Texas National Guard Armory Board was created in 1935.

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armory followed a standardized plan. The building's form, massing, and style—which exhibit militaristic and defense-related architectural motifs—are representative of pre-World War II, twentieth-century armories built across the country.

The purpose of the armory was to provide space for the military unit to train, meet, and store supplies. Additionally, military units hosted not only their own families, but also the local community for bazaars, dances, and sporting events. These functions required specific arrangements for club rooms, kitchens, classrooms, locker rooms, and offices. Among the most important spaces in armories were drill halls. Particularly necessary for armories in urban settings with limited adjoining land, drill halls provided large, double-height interior rooms for formation and drill practice. The building plan and organization and configuration of rooms varied based on the building's location and setting, the membership size of the military unit, and the unit's particular practice needs. Among the most common plans for urban armories built in the first half of the twentieth century was the one Finn employed for the HLGA, a T-plan. This plan consists of a front “head house,” or an administrative block with a flat roof with a central entrance and a large rear drill hall with a gable, gambrel, or curved roof.⁵⁵ This plan typically had side and rear entrances and a second-floor balcony overlooking the drill floor. The T-plan draws from the design of the Seventh Regiment Armory in New York City. Designed by architect Charles W. Clinton, this armory was hailed as “a new, uniquely American building type” upon its 1881 completion.⁵⁶ Other common armory shapes were the I-plan—more prevalent in rural areas—and the rectangular plan that catered to cavalry units and did not have a drill hall.⁵⁷

Equally important as designing a building that would accommodate the needs and use of military units, the architectural style of armories needed to convey a sense of military might and the elite status of the guardsmen. Though armory style evolved over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the grand styles used for armories prior to World War II reflected the perceived importance and dominance the guardsmen wanted to project to their communities. Within this context, the HLGA reflects this national phenomenon in armory design. By the early twentieth century, armory architecture shifted from the nineteenth-century fortress-like medieval style. Referred to as “military Gothic” in *Architectural Record*, the style featured rusticated masonry, towers, turrets, and castellations.⁵⁸ In the first three decades of the twentieth century, the style was largely abandoned in armory design for more restrained styles. The shift reflected national trends in architecture that embraced revival styles, particularly the Classical Revival, for institutional and governmental buildings. Changing views on the role of militias and National Guard units further impacted armory design. No longer just “fortresses,” armories were also social spaces with clubhouses, and militia and guardsmen sought to portray this with less formidable and plainer designs while still conveying a sense of importance, strength, dominance, and security.⁵⁹ Tracy, Swartwout and Litchfield, a New York architecture firm, expressed this changing thought on armory design in a letter to the District of Columbia Armory Commission in 1910:

*Upon consideration it is hard to understand why the architecture of a mediaeval castle should have been thought to be appropriate for a modern armory. Surely, the confusion and irregularity of such a style is entirely out of keeping with modern military ideals... A modern armory should recall the military regularity of the army, its simplicity and effectiveness, and it should have the dignity which would seem consonant with the army.*⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Kristine Wilson, “Pennsylvania National Guard Armories,” Multiple Property Documentation Form, Pennsylvania Museum and Historical Commission, 1989, F.II - 2.

⁵⁶ Kristine M. Kidorf, “Lansing Artillery National Guard Armory,” National Register Nomination Form, National Park Service, 2010, 10.

⁵⁷ Wilson, “Pennsylvania National Guard Armories,” F. II – 2.

⁵⁸ Robert Fogelson, *America's Armories: Architecture, Society, and Public Order*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 149.

⁵⁹ Fogelson, *America's Armories*, 188.

⁶⁰ Fogelson, *America's Armories*, 188.

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Reflecting this shift, “virtually none of the armories built in the 1910s and 1920s looked like a medieval castle or fortresses,” according to urban historian emeritus Robert M. Fogelson.⁶¹ Some architects rejected the formerly popular precedent altogether and designed armories in revival styles, including Classical Revival and Greek Revival styles. Others, like Finn, designed a restrained version of the “military Gothic” style. Finn’s design, influenced by the Neo-Gothic style, incorporated “military Gothic” elements such as arched windows and buttresses but was more subtle and modern in both materials—lacking the rusticated stone of the “military Gothic”—and ornamentation – lacking tower and turrets. The building also draws influence from the Jacobean Revival style. Based on English styles from the Jacobean period of the seventeenth century and mixed with American Eclectic stylistic influences, Jacobean Revival buildings first appeared in the U. S. in the early nineteenth century and remained in fashion into the 1930s.⁶² Known for its high cost of construction due to the elaborate designs with lavish ornamentation, the style was generally confined in the U. S. to the affluent, used in residential, educational, and institutional design. Typical character-defining features of non-residential buildings constructed in the Jacobean style include a brick body with stone trim, projecting bays, transom windows, symmetrical facades, large chimneys, and pronounced entryways.⁶³ In his attempt to appeal to the self-perceived importance and elite status of the HLG, Finn likely drew inspiration from the Jacobean Revival style. Finn also maintained a sense of function for the building by incorporating cast-stone military motifs, such as shields, as ornamentation. Though less fortress-like than the armories of the nineteenth century, armories, including the Houston Light Guard Armory, built in twentieth century in these muted “military Gothic” styles still conveyed the sense of importance that the guardsmen wished to portray. Imposing in size and design, these armories reflected the elite status of the guardsmen and served to symbolize the guardsmen’s dominance over the working class and racial minorities.⁶⁴ This style and similar muted versions of the “military Gothic” remained in favor in armory design through the 1920s before giving way to subsequent modernist influences.

The HLGA’s T-plan and Neo-Gothic and Jacobean Revival stylistic influences make it an excellent example of an early twentieth-century American armory building. In his description of the armory, Finn stated, “It will be of the approved design for such buildings, erected in the form of a huge T. The front will be three stories high, with a drill hall forming the stem of the T to the rear.”⁶⁵ Finn achieved a successful balance, with one building committee member describing the outcome:

*There is in the design, at first glance, a pleasing composition which carries out the ideas and ideals that I hoped that the structure would commemorate. It is not an apartment house, although there is a suggestion of hominess; it is not a church, still, there is something of veneration and memorial; it is not a club, because the architecture is too military in tone. It is not an armory, because of the other softer influences apparent; indeed, it is all of these and not any of them. The building is virile, masculine, effective and still not offensively so.*⁶⁶

⁶¹ Fogelson, *America’s Armories*, 189.

⁶² “Jacobean (1890-1940).” City of Urbana Historic Preservation. October 11, 2016. <https://urbanailinois.us/residents/historic-urbana/100-most-significant-buildings/architectural-styles/jacobean>; “Jacobean Revival.” SAH Archipedia, Society of Architectural Historians. Accessed October 23, 2023, <https://sah-archipedia.org/Styles/Jacobean-Revival>.

⁶³ “Jacobean Revival.” SAH Archipedia, Society of Architectural Historians. Accessed October 23, 2023, <https://sah-archipedia.org/Styles/Jacobean-Revival>; Jennifer Honebrink, “The Margaret,” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, NPS Gallery, April 2007, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/2ad4efb6-102d-4c0d-a7da-7441eb9e3ca0>.

⁶⁴ Fogelson, *America’s Armories*, 18.

⁶⁵ “Finn Selected Architect For Guard Armory,” undated newspaper article from Alfred C. Finn Collection, Houston Library.

⁶⁶ “New Home of Houston Light Guard Will Be of Composite Design and Big Asset to City,” *Houston Post Dispatch*, January 18, 1925, from Alfred C. Finn Collection, Houston Library

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The building is also a rare example of a pre-World War II armory in Texas. The state has a number of extant post-war armories; however, records of extant pre-war armories are limited, and none are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The HLGA is the only pre-war armory in the Military Facilities Commission Records inventory at the Texas State Archives, though another source, the Texas Military Forces Museum, identifies 10 National Guard armories, including the HLGA, in Texas in 1940.⁶⁷ At least one pre-1940 armory—the Waco National Guard Armory—was originally constructed for non-armory purposes and rented for armory use.⁶⁸ Of eight other armories in the 1940 inventory, only the Port Arthur armory, at the southeast corner of Augusta Avenue and 4th Street, was identified as extant. Currently part of Lamar State College, this former armory lacks physical integrity with substantial alterations to the building's original design, materials, and workmanship.

Alfred Charles Finn (1883–1964)

Alfred C. Finn, the architect of the Houston Light Guard Armory, was a prominent architect in Texas in the first half of the twentieth century. Despite neither formal training nor an architecture degree, Finn designed more than 40 commercial buildings, residences, hotels, theaters, and public buildings. Finn worked in Texas cities, including Wharton, Longview, and Tyler, though he was most prolific in Houston, where he designed multiple landmark buildings. Of the more than 15 buildings he designed in Texas that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places, 12 are in Houston.⁶⁹

Born in 1883 in Bellville, Austin County, Texas, Finn spent his childhood in Hempstead, roughly 60 miles northwest of Houston. After four years working for a railroad in Houston, Finn completed a correspondence course in architecture and moved to Dallas in 1904, where he worked as a draftsman for renowned architectural firm Sanguinett and Staats.⁷⁰ Promoted to assistant manager at the firm, Finn worked at their Fort Worth office between 1907 and 1912, and then at their Houston office, before establishing his own firm in 1913. This coincided with a period of sustained local growth after the Houston Ship Channel opened in 1914 and the state's expanding oil industry that fueled Finn's firm with abundant opportunities. Finn's projects included skyscrapers, theaters, and residences for Houston's elite. Some of his earliest local works include the Foster and Mason Buildings (1913, demolished), the Rusk Building (1915, demolished), the Bankers Mortgage Building (1922), the Milam, Electric, and State National Bank buildings (1923, listed in the National Register of Historic Places), the 17-story Rice Hotel Wing (1925, listed in the National Register of Historic Places), the Metropolitan Theatre (1926, demolished), Loew's State Theatre (1927, demolished), and the 16-story Lamar Hotel (1927, demolished). In 1929, Finn designed the 37-story Gulf Building, the state's tallest edifice in the 1920s and the tallest building in Houston until 1963 (listed in the National Register of Historic Places).

During the Depression era, Finn's firm worked on some of the most prominent publicly financed projects in the state. Through the Public Works Administration (PWA), Finn designed the Sam Houston Coliseum and Music Hall in Houston (1937, demolished), the U.S. Post Office, Courthouse, and Customhouse in Galveston (1937, listed in the National Register of Historic Places), and the 570-foot-tall San Jacinto Monument in La Porte (1939, part of the San Jacinto Battlefield National Historic Landmark District). During the last three decades of his career, Finn designed the Sakowitz Brothers Department Store in Houston (1951), Ben Taub Hospital in Houston (1958), and the Ezekiel W. Cullen Administration Building at the University of Houston (1950). Finn practiced until his 1964 death.

⁶⁷ [Texas Military Facilities Commission Records: An Inventory of Military Facilities Commission Records at the Texas State Archives, 1921-2007 - TARO \(txarchives.org\)](https://txarchives.org/TARO/texasnationalguard/armories-1940), [Texas National Guard Armories - 1940 \(texasmilitaryforcesmuseum.org\)](https://texasmilitaryforcesmuseum.org)

⁶⁸ The National Guard leased the 1928 McDermott Motors Building from 1931 until World War II. The property was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2004.

⁶⁹ National Register of Historic Places Nomination Catalog, Texas Historical Commission, Texas Historic Sites Atlas, accessed October 29, 2022, <https://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/AdvancedSearch>. Includes both individually listed and contributing buildings in listed historic districts.

⁷⁰ Michael E. Wilson, "Alfred C. Finn: Houston Architect," *Houston History Magazine*, Summer 1983, 2.

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In Finn's diverse portfolio, which includes gas stations, hospitals, residences, and churches, the HLGA is significant as his only armory and an excellent example of his version of Gothic- and Jacobean Revival-inspired architectural design (Figure 14). The armory's style is significant as Finn's only Jacobean Revival inspired designs and one of only a few Gothic-inspired designs by Finn. Early in his career, Finn employed a variety of popular revival styles, including the Renaissance Revival and Classical Revival styles. Finn also designed in Modernist styles, like Art Deco and Art Moderne. Other extant Gothic-inspired buildings attributed to Finn include the 1930 St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church in Houston and the Gulf Building, also in Houston (both individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places).⁷¹ Different from the armory in form and function, these two buildings also have subtle, yet distinguishable, stylistic differences. The Gulf Building combines the Gothic Revival style with Art Deco influences applied to its concrete and tan brick veneer. St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church is a Late Gothic Revival-style building with a smooth limestone veneer, tracery at windows, and a complex roofline that encompasses its grand scale. Thus, the HLGA is a distinctive example of Finn's Gothic-inspired design applied to the armory property type.

Conclusion

As home to the Houston Light Guards, the armory is the sole extant building associated with this significant military unit. It stands as a landmark to their history and the larger chronicle of militias and the National Guard in Texas and is therefore eligible at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Military History. Additionally, the Houston Light Guard Armory, designed by renowned architect Alfred C. Finn, embodies the archetype of early twentieth-century armory architecture. Its distinct form and plan, division into sections, and Neo-Gothic and Jacobean Revival style make it an excellent example of an early twentieth-century armory with a high degree of physical and historical integrity. Therefore, it is nominated at the local level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture.

⁷¹ Finn also designed the St. Paul Lutheran Evangelical Church in Brenham, Texas, in the Late Gothic Revival style, but a modern addition impacted its integrity.

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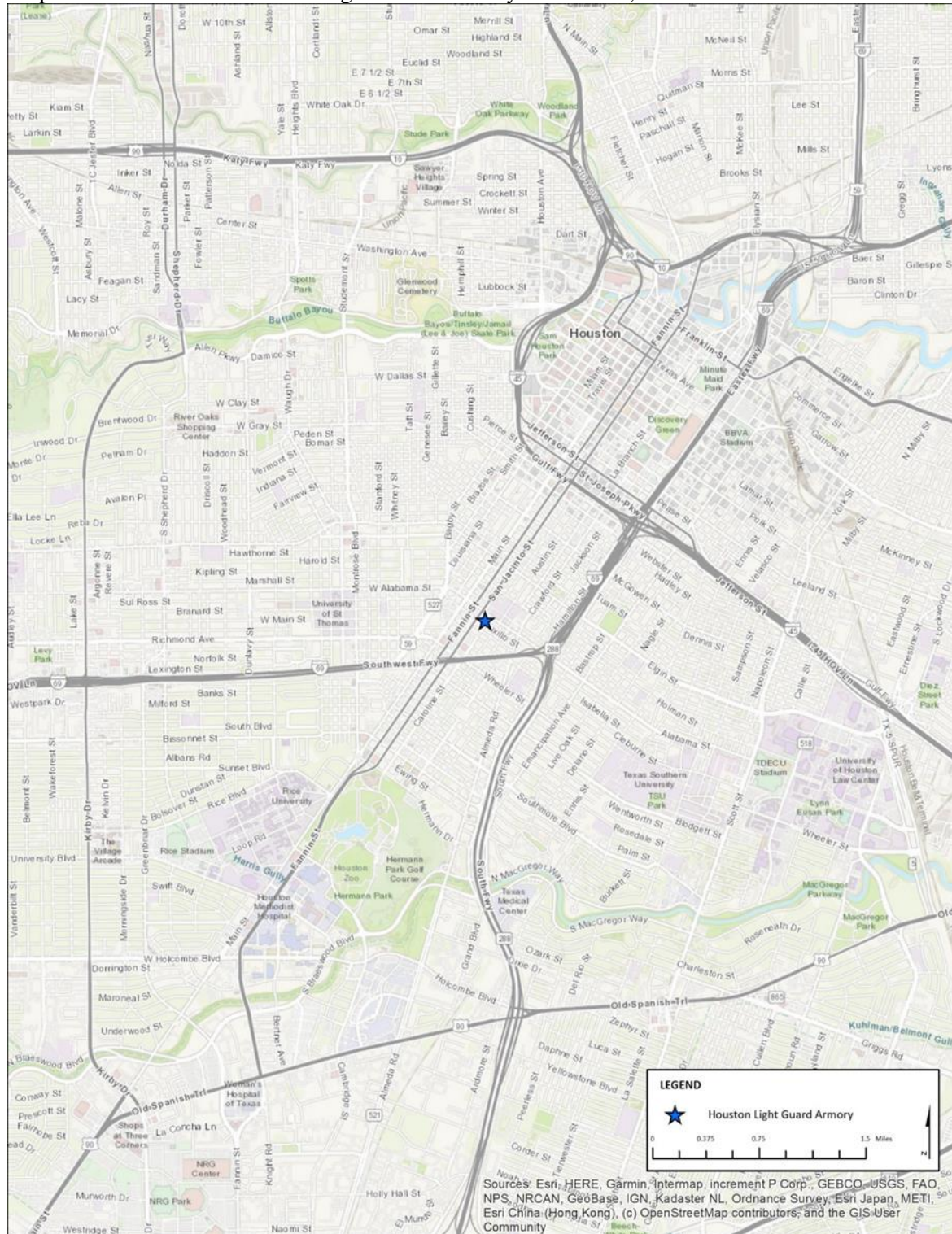
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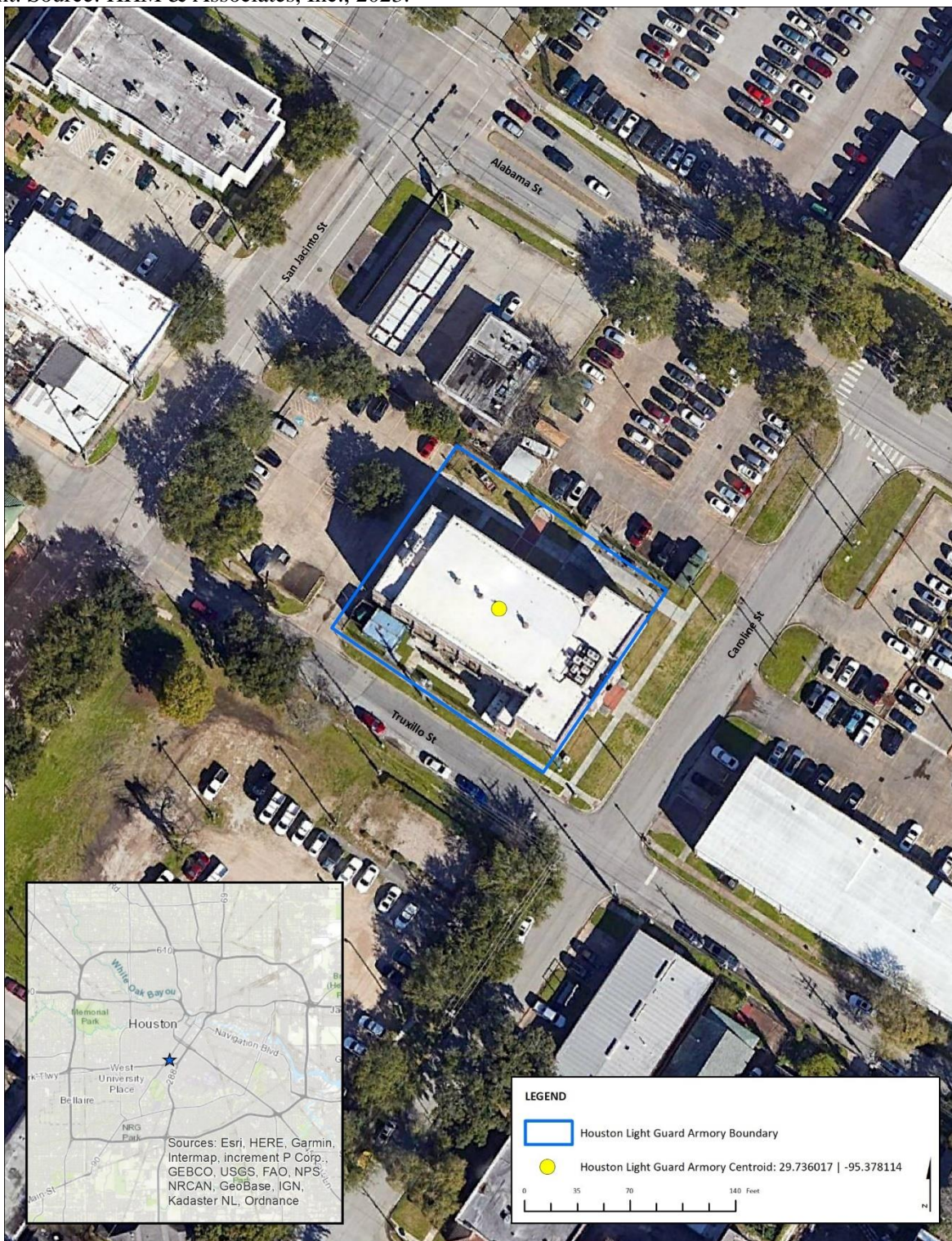
Maps

Map 1. Location of the Houston Light Guard Armory in Houston, Texas. Source: HHM & Associates, Inc., 2023.



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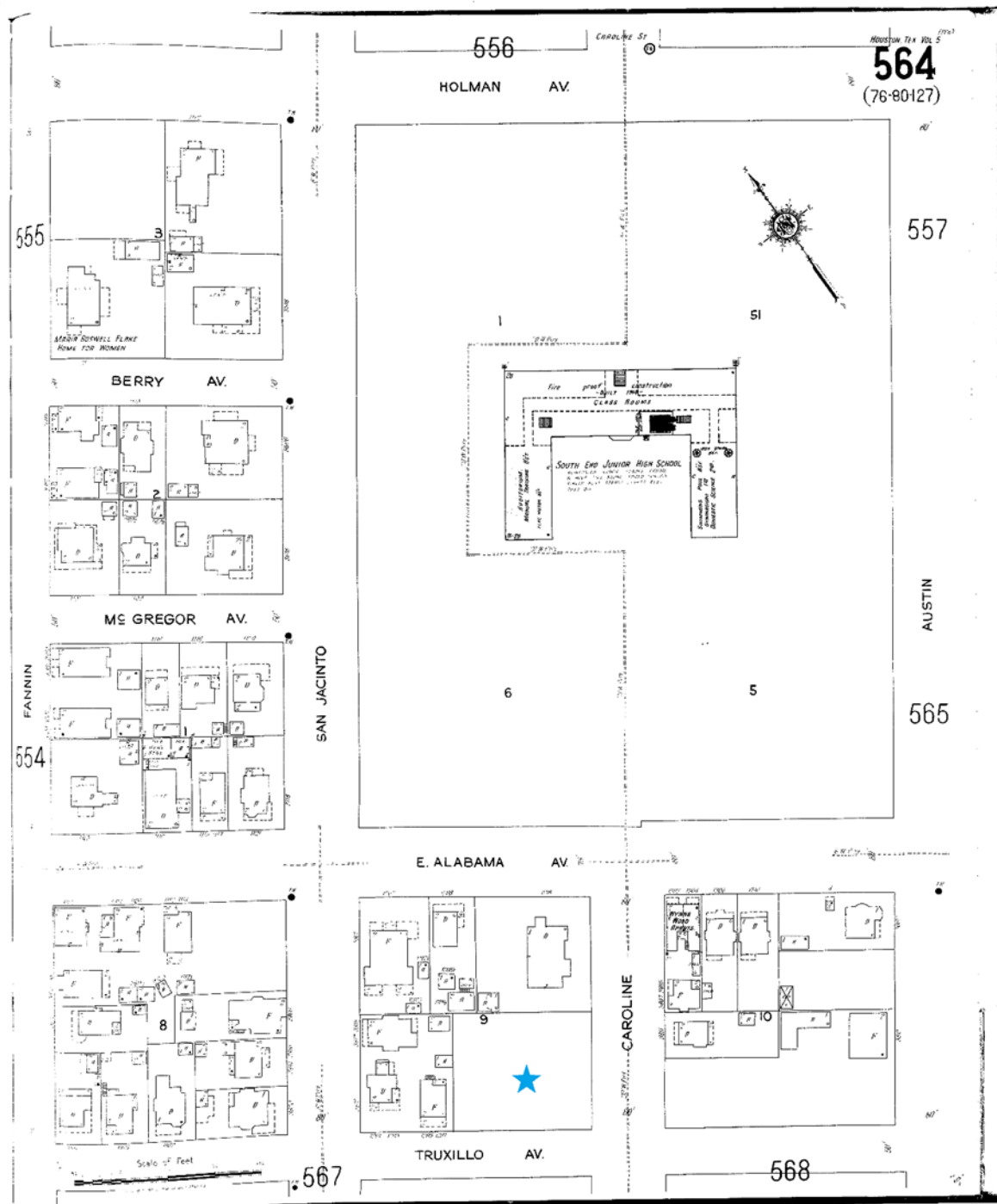
Map 2. Aerial view of the Houston Light Guard Armory in Houston showing the NRHP boundary and coordinates of the central point. Source: HHM & Associates, Inc., 2023.



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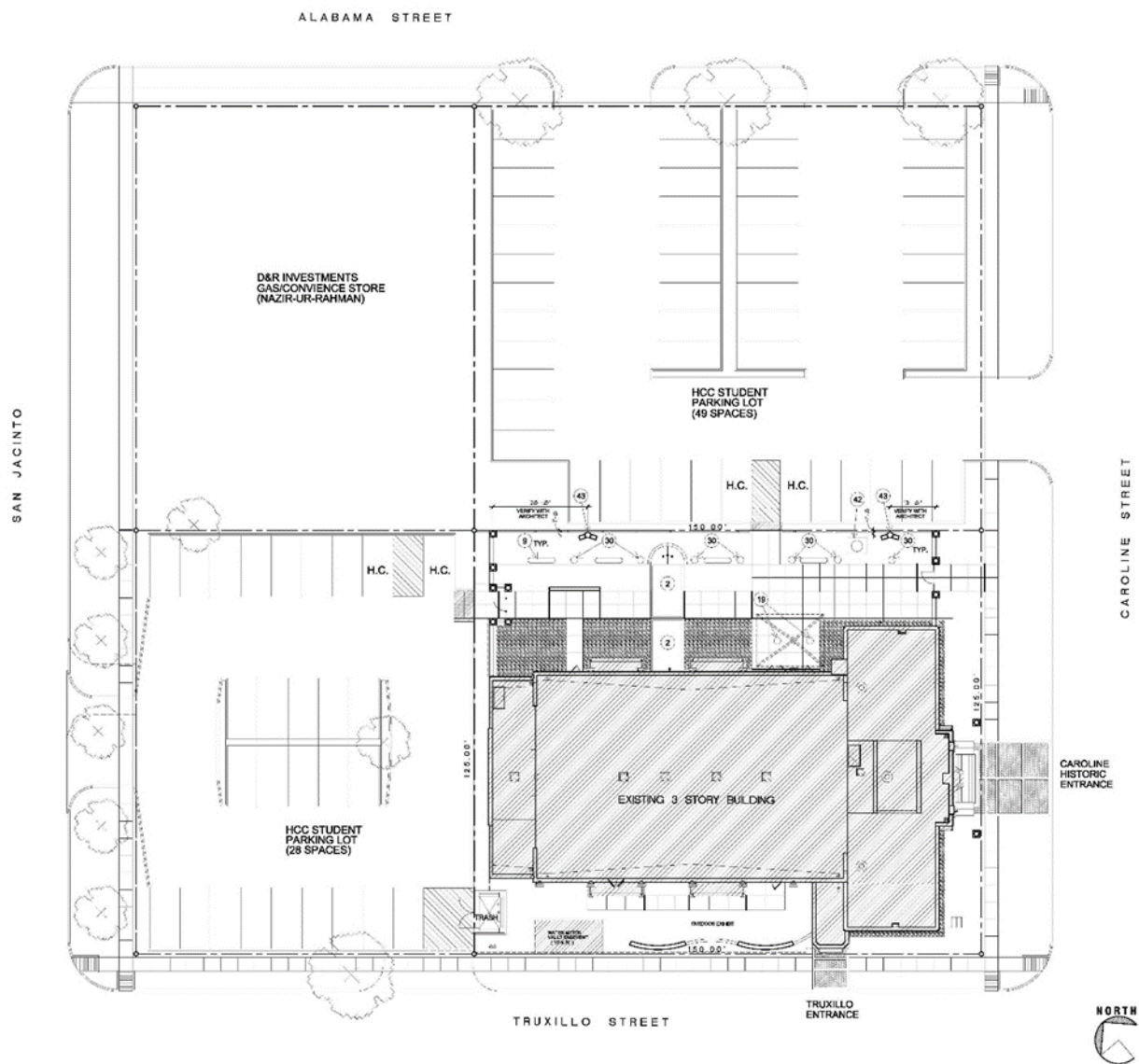
Figures

Figure 1. Sanborn Fire Insurance map from 1924, one year before construction of the armory. The armory's parcel is identified by the star. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Houston, Texas, 1942, Vol. 5, Sheet 564, from ProQuest.



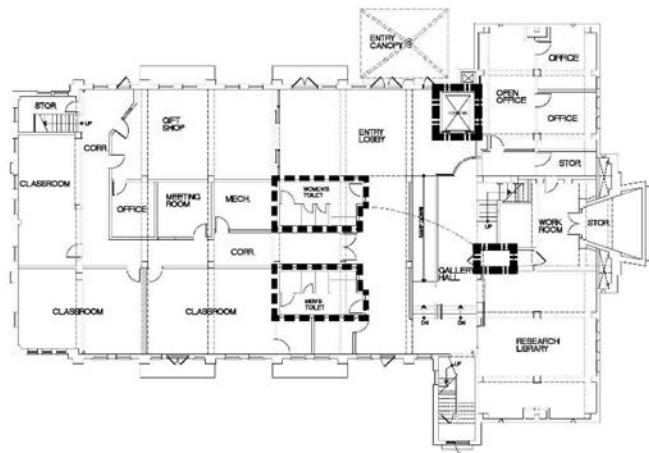
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Figure 2. Site plan for the block bounded by San Jacinto, Alabama, Caroline, and Truxillo Streets. The armory occupies the southeast corner. Source: RDC Architects, 2016, for the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum.

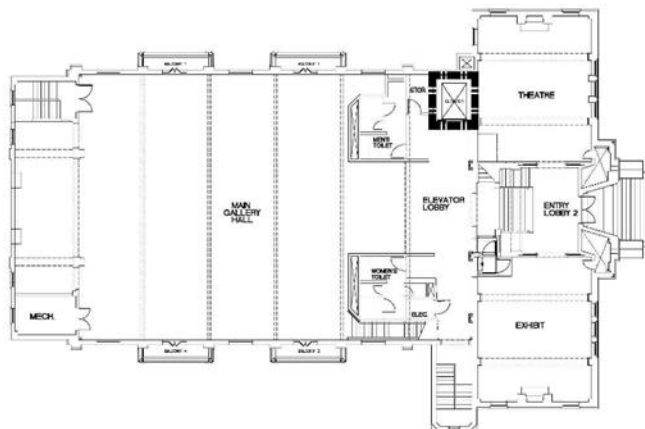


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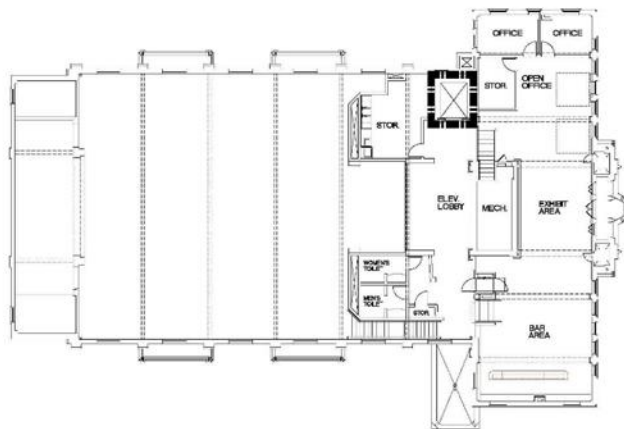
Figure 3. Current floor plans. Note that this drawing refers to the floors differently than the nomination text. The ground floor is identified as “First Floor Plan,” the first floor is identified as “Second Floor Plan,” and the second floor is identified as “Mezzanine Floor Plan.” Source: RDC Architects, 2016, for the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



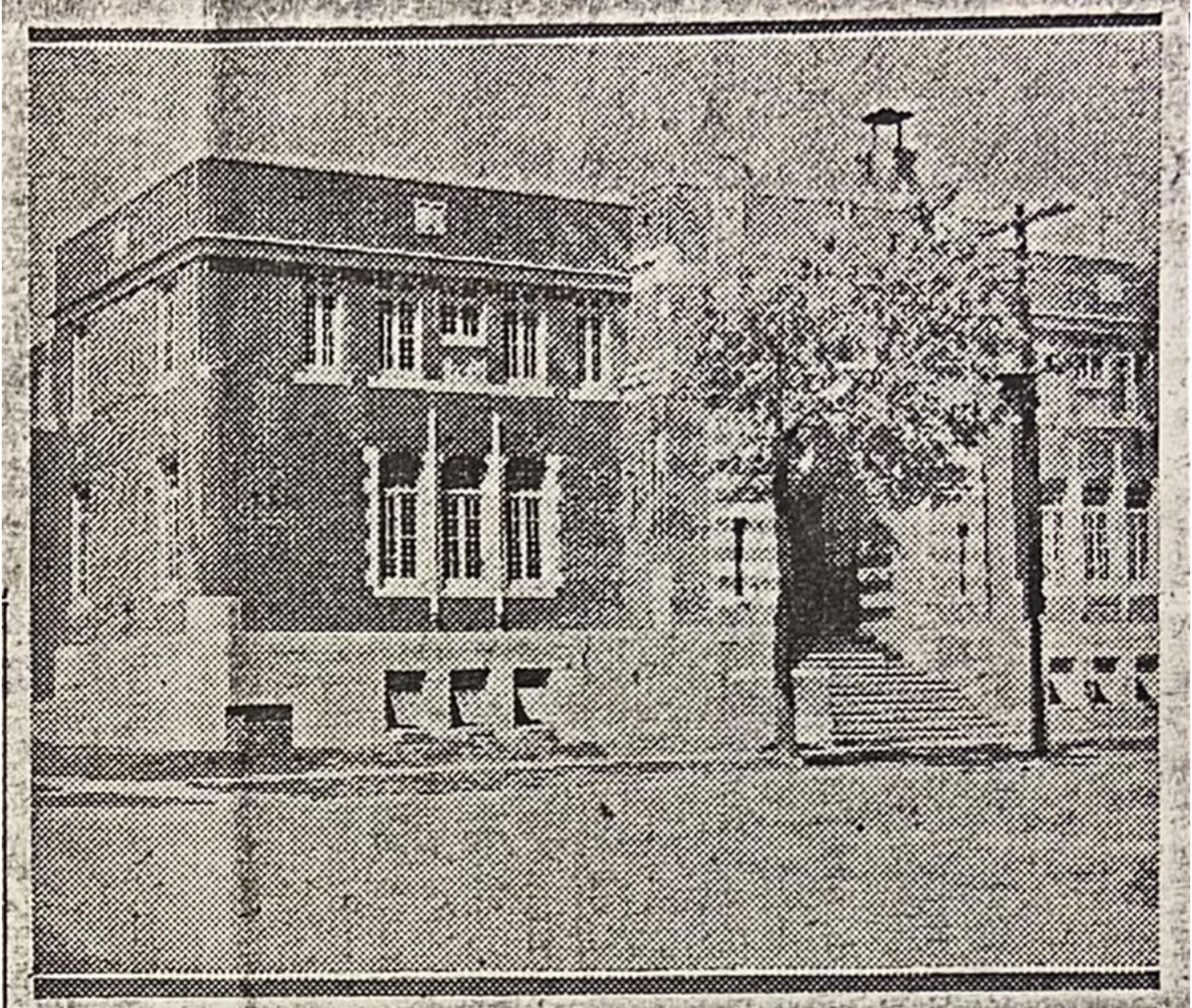
SECOND FLOOR PLAN



MEZZANINE FLOOR PLAN

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Figure 4. Photograph of the armory from about 1930. Source: "Military Unit Won Glory and Cash in Drills," *The Houston Post*, Saturday, April 21, [1930], Alfred C. Finn Collection, Houston History Research Center Repository, Houston Public Library.



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Figure 5. The mezzanine in the drill hall as originally built, before renovation, unknown date. Source: Texas Historical Commission. [Light Guard Armory], photograph, unknown date; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph949090/>: accessed February 9, 2023), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Texas Historical Commission.



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Figure 6. The stage in the drill before renovation, unknown date. Source: Texas Historical Commission. [Light Guard Armory], photograph, unknown date; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph949447/>: accessed February 9, 2023), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Texas Historical Commission.



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Figure 7. The mezzanine in the drill hall in 2008. Source: Buffalo Soldiers National Museum.



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Figure 8. The drill hall in 2008. Source: Buffalo Soldiers National Museum.



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Figure 9. The general club room in the front wing in 2008. Source: Buffalo Soldiers National Museum.



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Figure 10. Brick separating at the rear (northwest) façade in 2010. Source: Texas Historical Commission.



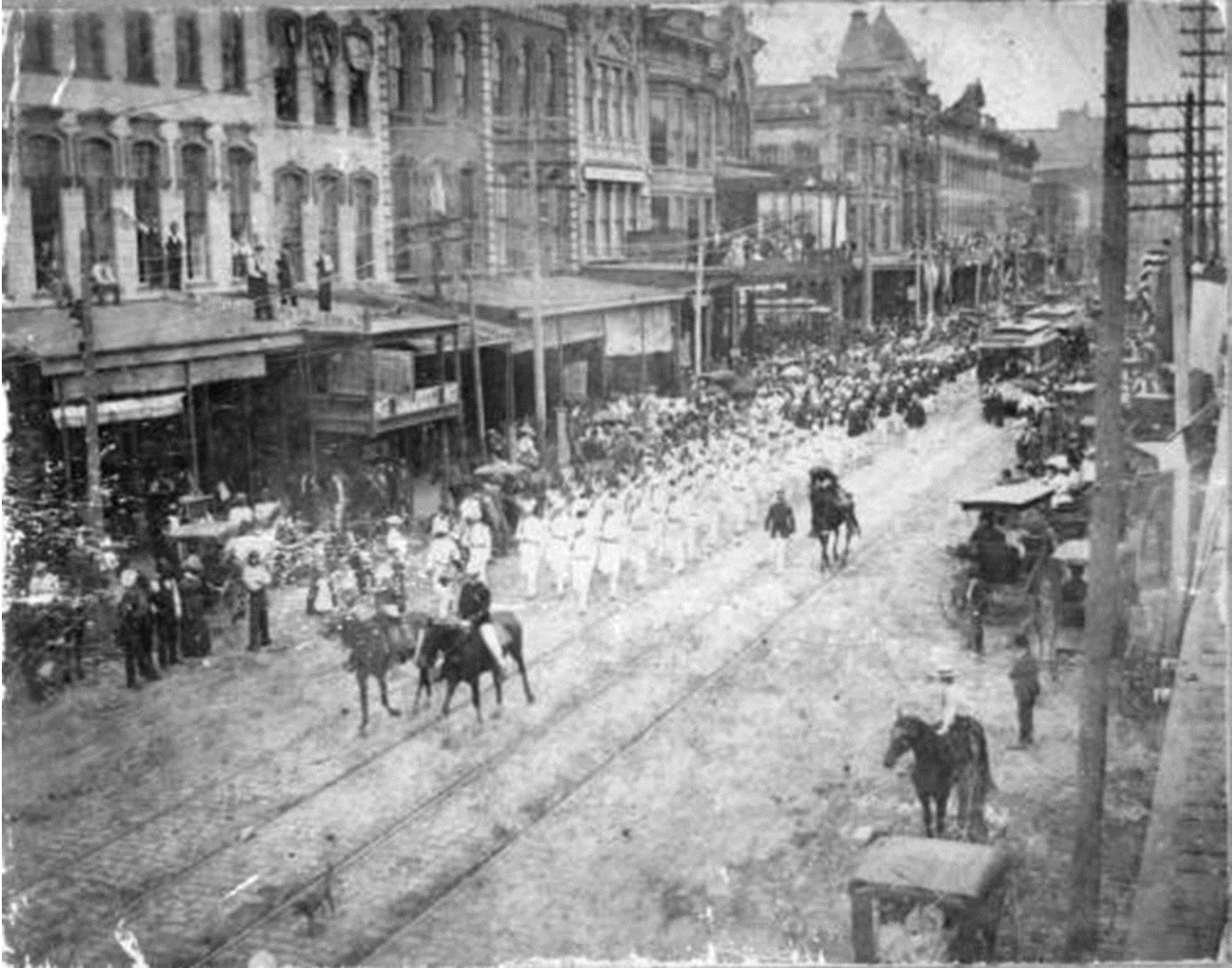
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Figure 11. The front southeast façade in 2010. Source: Texas Historical Commission.



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Figure 12. The Houston Light Guards parading on Main Street, Houston in 1900. Source: MSS0157 Houston Photographic Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.



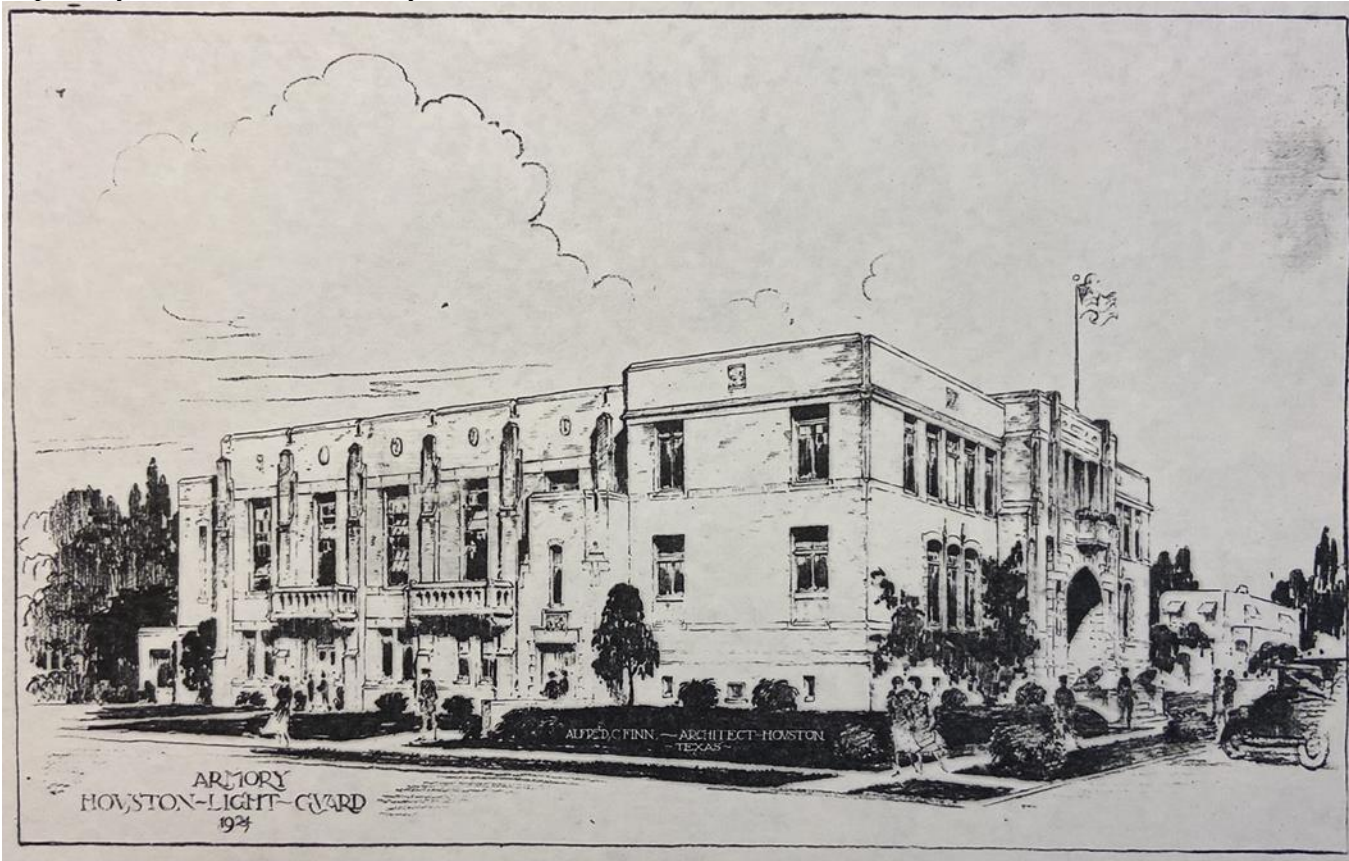
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Figure 13. Postcard showing the first Houston Light Guard armory in downtown Houston, left foreground, demolished in the 1930s. Source: eBay.



Houston Light Guard Armory, Harris County, Texas

Figure 14. Finn's drawing of the armory, 1924. Source: Alfred C. Finn Collection, Houston History Research Center Repository, Houston Public Library.



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Photos

All photos by Gregory Smith (THC), October 2023.

Photo 1. Front southeast façade. Camera facing northwest.



Houston Light Guard Armory, Harris County, Texas

Photo 2. Oblique of front southeast and side northeast façades. Camera facing south.



Houston Light Guard Armory, Harris County, Texas

Photo 3. Side northeast façade. Camera facing southwest.



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Photo 4. Current primary entrance into museum on the side northeast façade. Camera facing southwest.



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Photo 5. Lawn with commemorative objects and walkway at the side northeast façade. Camera facing northwest.



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Photo 6. Bell and cornerstone from the Mallalieu United Methodist Church at the side northeast façade. Camera facing north.



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Photo 7. Sidewalk and lawn along Caroline Street at the front southeast façade. Note the low brick pier near the corner of the building. Camera facing southwest.



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Photo 8. The inset balcony above the historic primary entrance on the southeast façade. Camera facing northwest.



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Photo 9. Oblique of the front southeast and side southwest façades. Camera facing north.



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Photo 10. Oblique of the side southwest and rear northwest façades. Camera facing northeast.



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Photo 11. Side northeast façade and rear of the front wing. Camera facing southeast.



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Photo 12. Rear northwest façade. Camera facing southeast.



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Photo 13. Interior stairwell within the stairwell ell on the side southwest façade. Camera facing southwest.



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Photo 14. Ground floor interior, reconfigured for the museum. Camera facing northwest.



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Photo 15. Ground floor interior, with entrance lobby and ramp to lower office and library space. Camera facing northeast.



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Photo 16. Former club room with historic fireplace on first floor of front wing, south of the historic-period entrance lobby. Camera facing southeast.



Houston Light Guard Armory, Harris County, Texas

Photo 17. Original sliding pocket door in former south club room opening to front wing historic-period entrance lobby. Camera facing north.



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Photo 18. Terrazzo stairs leading from front wing historic-period entrance lobby to the drill hall. Camera facing northwest.



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Photo 19. Second floor of front wing. Camera facing southwest.



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Photo 20. Drill hall, with additions at corners, and portion of balcony. Camera facing south.



Houston Light Guard Armory, Harris County, Texas

Photo 21. Stage on the northwest side of the drill hall, from balcony. Camera facing northwest.



- end -