

920-922 Metropolitan Ave Leavenworth

Historic Context

Established in 1897, the United States Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas served as the nation's first maximum-security federal prison. Congress authorized three federal prisons in 1891 by creating the Federal Prison System, but provided no funding until 1895, when Leavenworth was designated the first of the three to be completed. Designed by the St. Louis architectural firm, Eames & Young, in consultation with the first warden, J.W. French, the new prison combined the Pennsylvania Radial plan and the Auburn system of inmate reform into its Neo-Classical design.¹ Inmates from the neighboring Fort Leavenworth Military Prison, started construction of the penal facility in March 1897 and continued the process for 30 years when it was finally finished in 1929. Buildings, from 1897 to 1929, were completed based upon the order of their importance to the efficient operation of USP with the materials supplied by a quarry one mile from the prison or from the earth within or near its boundaries.² The first Federal inmates transferred to USP from the military prison in January 1906.

The architecture reflected the facility's function and contemporary styles used in federal and civic buildings. The prison was erected on a 754-acre property, along with other support facilities located outside of the walls. Funds totaling \$150,000 were initially allocated for the project in 1896. These additional facilities, built from 1903-1924 included a cemetery, dairy barn, mule shed, and residences for the Warden, Assistant Warden, Deputy Warden and Chief Medical Officer. Industrial facilities constructed later included a hatchery, heifer barn, maintenance garage, warehouses, and receiving depots. All of these structures helped make the prison self-sufficient from the outside world. Industries conducted at the prison saved the federal government money by producing its supplies internally, helped fund new educational and vocational programs and security measures and helped contribute to the war effort as a military supply center beginning in 1941 with the attack on Pearl Harbor.³

Leavenworth experienced additional growth from 1930 through the end of World War II with newly constructed buildings and improvements to existing facilities. Buildings erected from 1930 to 1948 included a maintenance shop, large storehouse, 250-bed hospital (replacing 1915 hospital, quarantine building, and tuberculosis annex), new guard towers, large rectangular warehouse and a large wing addition to the shoe factory.

Staff housing, including 920-922 Metropolitan Avenue, was constructed ca. 1937 using Public Works Administration (PWA) funding. Two years later, the USP Correctional Officers' and Employees' Club was

¹ The Auburn system combined the isolation of prisoners with silent congregation and a program of inmate labor with tiers of individual cells stacked back-to-back in the center of the building and opening into a corridor along the exterior walls that made up the shell of the building. The Pennsylvania system also focused on solitary confinement in which prisoners had minimal contact with inmates and guards, performed marketable labor and physical exercise inside their cells, and which featured a radial plan in which each tier of cells radiated from a central guard station.

² *USP Leavenworth Historic Structures Report.*

³ *USP Leavenworth Historic Structures Report.*

completed. The houses were most likely constructed utilizing inmate labor and bricks from the brick factory that operated from 1897 to 1936, at the northeast corner of the USP construction site.⁴ These residences were available to staff transferring from other Federal prison institutions.⁵ From 1948 to the present, additional construction and adaptation helped modernize USP Leavenworth. Buildings were demolished, remodeled, or added, but at a much slower pace. The most significant additions were a Federal Penitentiary Camp (FPC) in 1960, and Education building in 1963 (first added within prison walls in 20 years), and a \$30 million renovation of the prison in 1984.⁶

⁴ LaMaster, Kenneth M., *Images of America: U.S. Penitentiary Leavenworth*, (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 23.

⁵ LaMaster, *Images of America*, 115.

⁶ *USP Leavenworth Historic Structures Report*.