

These 1830s structures survive at the Mount Vernon/Searcy Hospital site



By [Kelly Kazek](#) | kkazek@al.com
[Email the author](#) | [Follow on Twitter](#)
on September 08, 2016 at 8:12 AM

Today, 34 buildings remain at Searcy, although many are beyond repair. Of the 23 structures built for the arsenal during the first construction period in the 1830s, at least 13 survive (the guard house and dispensary were made into a single building for the hospital administration), including:

Main arsenal building, ca.-1835. Three-story building with five-story turret. After 1865, it was used as barracks, and then as a patient ward for the hospital.

Commanding officers' quarters, ca.-1835. Later used as hospital wards and then the patient library.

Blacksmith shop, ca.-1835. This one-story brick building was used as officers' quarters from 1865-1895. As part of the early hospital, it was used for operating rooms, and later for patient evaluation programs.

Barracks, ca. 1835. This building has a hexagonal stair tower in the rear center. It was initially barracks for enlisted soldiers, then served as officers' quarters from 1865-1895. For the hospital, it was used by white nurses, who were housed separately during segregation. In later years, it was the staff development center.

Armourer's shops 1 and 2. "Armourer" or armorer, is a term dating to a time when armor was in use and was **common in the British military**. In this case, it described a skilled tradesman who kept firearms and munitions in proper working order. The second shop has a large addition to the rear added in the 1920s.

Subaltern's quarters, ca.-1835. "Subaltern" is a term common in the British military, which would have still been in popular use in the U.S. in the 1830s. It means "subordinate" and refers to commissioned officers below the rank of captain. The building was used as the doctors' quarters from 1865-1895 when the site was still a military post, as a dining room and a patient was by the hospital in early years and a quarters for visiting doctors in later years.

Office, ca.1835. Used as the paymaster's office for the arsenal and as a dining room for the early hospital. Its last use was as a pharmacy and supply room.

Laboratory/morgue, ca.-1835. Used as a munitions lab when the site was an arsenal and as a morgue for the hospital.

Guardhouse, ca. 1830s. Located at the entrance of the perimeter fence, this building became part of the hospital administration building during the rebuilding phase in 1902. Located just outside the arsenal wall, this is where visitors would have come before entering the hospital grounds.

Sutler's store/dispensary, ca.-1835. A sutler was a term for a person who sold supplies to the military. This building was assimilated into the hospital administration building, along with the guard house.

Perimeter wall, ca.-1836. A 12-foot-high, one-mile long brick wall surrounds the original part of the complex.

Picket fence, ca-1835. Only portions of the fence remain. This was a unique type of wooden fence used in 19th century arsenals with thick, rounded, vertical pickets held by horizontal pieces. According to historian Michael Panhorst, the fence is the only known surviving example of its kind.

Retaining wall, ca.-1830. Used for buttressing the crest of the hill and the top of the ravine.

The hospital building period

When the site became a hospital, old buildings were modified inside the perimeter and new ones were built, including the large columned, brick building called Unit 2 that housed male patients.

In addition, several structures were built just outside the perimeter wall, including the administration building, which was created from the existing guard house and dispensary. Other structures in this small outer village included employees' cottages, a cook's house, and the superintendent's residence, a stately mansion that is being maintained by the Mount Vernon Historical Society.

At least three cottages outside the perimeter wall date from ca. 1878 when they were used as housing for married soldiers and non-commissioned officers. These were added during a building phase that lasted from 1865-1895, when the site was used as military barracks and an Apache prison. The hospital used the cottages as employee residences. A larger residence was built nearby in 1905 for use by hospital employees.

The modern building period

Several buildings survive from the last building period, from 1935-2012, including a picturesque chapel built in 1975 that is now covered in kudzu, as well as two large, modern hospital wards. These buildings are not considered to have historical significance.

Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [User Agreement](#) and [Privacy Policy](#)

© 2016 Alabama Media Group. All rights reserved ([About Us](#)).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Alabama Media Group.

Community Rules apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

[▶ Ad Choices](#)