

Historic Armories in Indiana

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The cultural resource inventory of the Indiana National Guard includes a diversity of resources, including two historic districts, three bridges, airplane hangars, a Prisoner of War chapel, archeological sites, and armories. Of the 62 National Guard Armory sites found in the state of Indiana, eight structural resources are identified as eligible or listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In December 2010, the National Guard Bureau, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers signed a Programmatic Agreement for the maintenance and repair of National Guard Armories. Adopted by the Indiana National Guard in March 2010, the Programmatic Agreement streamlines Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act reporting on National Register eligible or listed armories for maintenance projects. To assist in the proper compliance of the Programmatic Agreement, a survey of the National Register eligible armories character defining features was completed this summer by the staff of the Indiana National Guard. During this survey, every architectural feature of the armory was identified and recorded as either contributing or non-contributing. The survey of each armory provided the opportunity to examine and understand what features make each of these historic armories unique.

The Indianapolis Heslar Naval Armory, located north of Riverside Park along the White River, is listed as contributing resource in the Indianapolis Park and Boulevard System National Register District. The 1937 Heslar Naval Armory (Figure 1) is a monolithic concrete structure designed by local Indianapolis architects Ben H. Bacon and John P. Parrish and was built for the Naval Reserves. The project was funded by the Works Progress Administration and served as a Navy yeoman and radio technical training site during World War II. The interior of the Heslar Armory includes an assortment of features reminiscent of a ship, as the structure was designed as a modern, naval training facility on land. One of the most unique features is a water-tight training bulkhead, which permitted the space to be flooded to train seamen how to repair ship leaks (Figure 2). The drill hall, a feature of all armories, includes a ship deck and bridge on the west wall (Figure 3). Four large murals, depicting naval scenes, are placed in the four corners of the drill hall. Unique light fixtures found in the third floor include a ship's wheel with lanterns and glass globes painted with the map of the world. The third floor also includes an original bar, with a unique terrazzo countertop featuring naval iconography (Figure 4). Although the building has lost some of its unique features, such as the original swimming pool, it retains many items synonymous with its naval training heritage. The site continues in use as a Navy and Marine Corps Reserve Center, but is owned and managed by the Indiana State Armory Board.

The Michigan City Armory is similar to the Heslar Naval Armory in its association with the Naval Reserves. The Michigan City Naval Armory (Figure 5) was also designed by John P. Parrish and Ben H. Bacon and was completed in 1938. The Michigan City Armory features many of the same design features as the Heslar Armory, but on a smaller scope. The Michigan

City Armory was designed as a training facility for Navy radio technicians and repairmen. While the Heslar Armory is located along the White River, the Michigan City Armory is situated along an inlet that provides water access to Lake Michigan. The drill hall in Michigan City also features a ship bridge and balcony (Figure 6), glazed tile wainscot, with large, glass block window openings on its north and south walls. Unique light fixtures with anchors and lanterns feature on the drill hall balcony (Figure 7).

The Lebanon Armory is one of a handful of armories designed by Indianapolis architect Jacob Edwin Kopf. Built in 1939, the Lebanon Armory is similar to other armories designed by Kopf for the National Guard, including those the Guard still uses in Kokomo and Marion. The brick structure uses extensive limestone ornament and a strong emphasis on horizontality, with an iconic central bay. A limestone star with circle motif is highlighted on the central bay and then repeated along the south elevation (Figure 8). The drill hall inside the Lebanon Armory is still frequently rented for public events, retaining historic features such as glazed tile, a steel balcony, and the wood drill floor (Figure 9).

The Monticello MVSB (Motor Vehicle Storage Building) was originally constructed in 1950 as the Monticello Armory (Figure 10). This structure is known as a “header” armory, designed when the federal government provided funds for the construction of an equipment storage building, in turn, the state paid for an addition to house storage and administration offices. Many of these “header” armories were constructed in Indiana from 1949-1950, including this building in Monticello. Designed by Indianapolis architects Everett I. Brown Company, a carbon copy of this design is found in Alexandria, Connersville, Elkhart, Jasper, Logansport, North Vernon, and Richmond. However, the Monticello MVSB retains excellent integrity and is thus eligible as the best preserved example of its type. The exterior retains its original steel windows combined with areas of glass block. The brick structure features limestone trim primarily around window openings. The interior features a utilitarian space, including concrete floors and walls, with steel doors (Figure 11).

Built in 1957, the Crawfordsville Armory (Figure 12) was designed by local Crawfordsville architect Carroll O. Beeson. The armory is National Register eligible for its connection to Cold War history. The unit stationed at the armory when it first opened, the 139th Field Artillery, 38th Division, trained with the “Honest John” rocket, the first U.S. nuclear tactical weapon. The armory retains good integrity of its modern design, including its emphasis on horizontality, brick walls, the flat roof with wide overhanging eaves, and original steel windows. On the interior, the drill hall retains its concrete floor, steel trusses, and clerestory windows (Figure 13).

These five armories show the diverse collection of historic armories maintained by the Indiana National Guard. The information collected through this survey will be turned into reports to be reviewed by the DHPA to ensure the Guard continues to maintain the historic integrity of its armory buildings.



Figure 1: Heslar Naval Armory, Indianapolis, East Elevation



Figure 2: Training patch to be repaired in bulkhead area, First Floor, Heslar Naval Armory, Indianapolis



Figure 3: Ship bridge in Drill Hall, Third Floor, Heslar Naval Armory, Indianapolis



Figure 4: Original bar, Third Floor, Heslar Naval Armory, Indianapolis



Figure 5: Michigan City Armory, South and West Elevations, Michigan City



Figure 6: Drill Hall with Ship Bridge, First Floor, Michigan City Armory



Figure 7: Lantern and Anchor Light Fixture, Third Floor, Michigan City Armory



Figure 8: Detail of Star Ornaments over Garage, South Elevation, Lebanon Armory



Figure 9: Overall, Drill Hall, Viewing West, Lebanon Armory.



Figure 10: Monticello Motor Vehicle Storage Building, North and East Elevations



Figure 11: Motor Vehicle Storage, Overall viewing northeast, Monticello Motor Vehicle Storage Building



Figure 12: Overall South and East Elevations, Crawfordsville Armory



Figure 13: Crawfordsville Armory Drill Hall, Viewing Northeast