

Historic base building reaches centennial milestone

1st Contracting Squadron building, built in 1904, due to receive significant upgrades

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For 100 years, the stately brown building on the Langley shoreline near Eagle Park has provided a place to study, live and work for hundreds of people.

From his office on the first floor, southeast corner of the building – which was originally a porch – Michael Costlow, contracting specialist, likes working in the building. “The view, history and atmosphere are great here, and I especially like it when it’s decorated for Christmas and there’s snow on the ground,” said Mr. Costlow. “It will look nicer when it gets fixed up.

Margaret Santos, contracting specialist, also likes working in Building 90, and the soon-to-come future improvements.

“Proposals are still coming in,” said Mrs. Santos, referring to the much-needed improvements slated for the building. The masonry and brickwork will be re-pointed and the north porch will be renovated. According to other workers, the wind howls through the old leaky windows, and they will be replaced. The fire escapes on the north side, easily seen from Nealy Avenue will also be fixed so they look better and work correctly. New carpet and new stair treads will also be a part of the upgrades.

Mrs. Dayna Coverston, contracting specialist, works at her desk on the third floor, where the view is commanding. “I like the historical aspects of the building and I think it should be turned into a museum for the base,” said Mrs. Coverston.

According to the 1st Civil Engineer Squadron, the building has 15,819 square feet. Built at a cost of \$27,000 – in 1904 dollars – it was first used by Hampton Normal and

Agricultural Institute to teach Native Americans. The school is now known as Hampton University.

The head of the school's carpentry department, Mr. John Sugden, planned the construction of the facility, and it was built by the students under his direction. It was electrified courtesy of the Hampton Electric Company and the school's three windmills helped bring fresh water up from the well.

At one time as many as 60 students occupied the dormitory rooms. The male students tended the cows in the South Dairy Barn, now the Airman's Attic, and the girls at the institute learned to make butter in the basement. Although built about the same time as the institute dormitory, the barn is thought to have been built earlier in 1904, making it the base's oldest building.

The dairy produced 66,930 gallons of butter from January 1904 to January 1905, most of which was sold to the school and the Soldier's Home, now known as the Veteran's Administration Hospital in Hampton.

In February 1941 the government purchased the 330-acre Shellbank property and the house and the barn became part of Langley Field.

In the spring of this year the basement of Building 90 was cleaned out, and all the remaining asbestos was removed. But the old dark brick walls, the low ceiling in the basement and the dark corners provide an eerie atmosphere. Eerie enough to the point Mrs. Santos refuses to even consider going down into the bowels of the building.

But it is dry. Even though Hurricane Isabel ravaged the base with flood waters Sept. 18, 2003, the home of 1st CONS stayed dry. According to Mrs. Santos old photographs

of the building were found in the basement, and hopefully they will soon be put on display.

Senior Airman Steve Fennell, contracting specialist, likes his unique work space. The second-story office was probably a dormitory room 100 years ago, because it has one of the seven fireplaces in the building. “It’s not your typical cubicle,” said Airman Fennell. “I have a mantle to put things on.”

As the people in the base and the wing move on to be a part of the Air Force’s mission in the 21st Century, many appreciate the quaint reminders of the olden days.