This home, now the residence of Louisiana National Guard Maj. Gen. John Basilica Jr., was one of the staff houses that was renovated when the guard took over the old Hansen's Disease Center in 1999.

The Indian Camp Plantation has been preserved outside and remodeled inside since becoming the administration building for the Gillis W. Long Center, which houses the Louisiana Youth Challenge Program and several other military and governmental functions.

The new dining hall is seen through an arch in the covered walkway that connects the old dormitories at the National Hansen's Disease Center, which now houses the Louisiana Youth Challenge Program.

One of the 18 Hansen's disease patients who still live at the Gillis W. Long Center wheels a bicycle down one of the two-story covered walkways at the former leprosarium.

From a historical standpoint, the building after it began its life as a leprosarium.

exterior retains its former glory. Indian Camp, a sugar cane plantation originally named Woodlawn, is part of Carville's Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"From a historical standpoint, the (Louisiana Division of Historical Preservation) is really interested in the outside," said Col. Clyde Guidry, installation commander. "You have a little bit more flexibility on what's on the inside."

It's just as well, considering the history of the building after it begins its life as a leprosarium. The first patients arrived in 1894, and the Sisters of Charity came two years later.
years later, beginning a century of care to those afflicted with the disease.

"In some of the original documents that I'm going through written by the sisters, this man- 


tention was in such poor repair that the first patients lived in 


the slave quarters and the sisters 


toed up in the upstairs only," 


said Elizabeth Schexnvyder, cu- 


ator of the National Hansen's 


Disease Museum located in 


what was originally a kitchen 


building on the grounds. "The 


downtown was used for ani-


mals. Room by room, they 


managed to clean it up. It had a host of 


bats, snakes, you name it, 


rats. It was horrible."


Guard takes the reins

Things weren't so bad when the National Guard took over, but the entire site had suffered 


glorious neglect. When drugs developed 


to deal with lead paint and 


crumbling plaster.

One of the big expenses in renovating these structures, Guidry said, was asbestos 


abatement, but he also has had to deal with lead paint and crumbling plaster. 


"Everything inside is plaster," Guidry said. "Plaster, once 


it gets moist, turns to chalk, and 


it starts to flake... I'm telling you, 


there are some areas, there 


are ghosts here. I patch it. Two 


years later, it's chalking again. 


I patch it. I seal it on the outside. 


Two years later, it's the same 


spot. It's almost like a cancer. It 


doesn't want to go away. When 


you're dealing with old build-


ings, the cosmetic part is prob-


ably the most difficult. Struc-


turally, these buildings, they're 


not going anywhere."


They're just changing mis-


sions. Dorm rooms have become 


classrooms, offices and bar-


racks for participants in the 


Youth Challenge Program for 


at-risk teens, who live on site 


while learning military-style 


training.

A variety of military and other governmental 


organizations use the Gillis Long Center, 


including the Southern Anti-Terrorist 


Regional Training Academy and DHH Bioterrorism 


Training.

The former infirmary at the National Hansen's Disease Center has been turned into a conference center. A canopy used to cov-


er the flat roof, where patients in wheelchairs would be taken to enjoy the breeze off the nearby Mississippi River.


At right, Veterans of Foreign Wars members march in front of the male dormitories at the Na-


tional Hansen's Disease Center in 1947. The recent photo above shows the same buildings, lit-


tle changed on the outside, where the older oak trees now shade the widened driveway.

CARVILLE

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The former infirmary at the National Hansen's Disease Center has been turned into a conference center, a canopy used to cover the flat roof, where patients in wheelchairs would be taken to enjoy the breeze off the nearby Mississippi River.

Archival photo provided by the National Hansen's Disease Museum

A variety of military and other governmental organizations use the Gillis Long Center, including the Southern Anti-Terrorist Regional Training Academy and DHH Bioterrorism Training.

The new Army National Guard Armory, a state-of-the-art training center, is one of the new build-


ings added to the Gillis W. Long Center since the Guard took it over from the U.S. Public Health Service in 1999.

Neglect no longer an issue

One thing is clear: The re-


pair issues are no longer due 


to neglect. A variety of military 


and other governmental orga-


nizations use the Gillis Long Center, including the Southern Anti-Terrorist Regional Training Academy and DHH Bioterrorism Training. There are 146 staff members who live on site.

It's not unusual, Schexnvyder said, for visitors or new resi-


dents to become concerned 


about the center's history. 


"I'd have to say about 10 per-


cent of my visitors do have 


a little visceral reaction when 


they find out this was a leprosy 


quarantine center," Schexnvy-


der said. "I'd say that's an av-


erage... where they really 


start exhibiting symptoms of 


anxiety. I've had people break 


down in sweat. But part of 


my mission is education. I ex-


plain to them what leprosy is, 


what it isn't, how it presents on 


the body, how rare it is, how it 


is treated. But I'm one of the 


people who had one of those re-


actions when I first got there, 


so I know that."

Guidry credits U.S. Rep. Richard Baker for helping make the center available to the National Guard after the Public Health Service wanted to get rid of it and for earmarking funds for major renovations that keep the facility's history alive even after its primary purpose has changed.

"It's preserving something that will never occur again," Guidry said.

"Let's hope," Schexnvyder said.