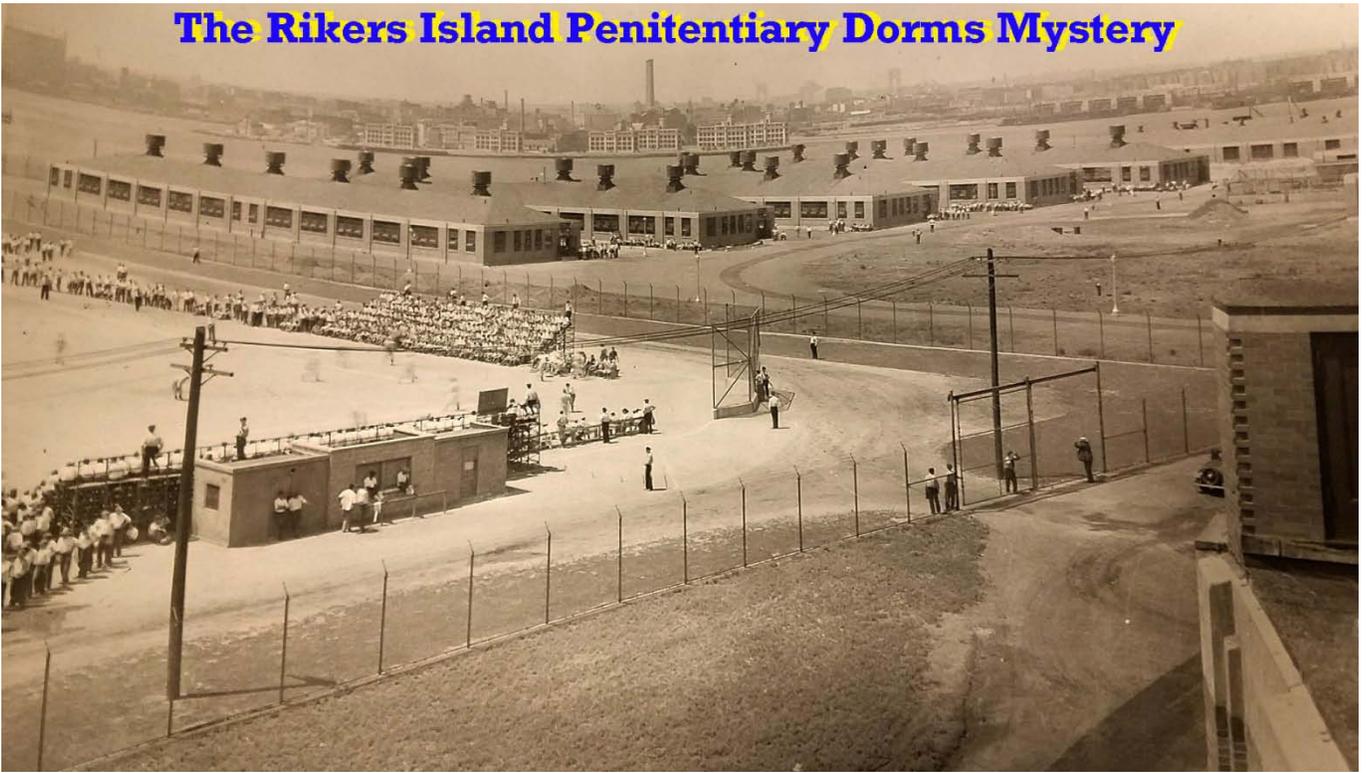


The Rikers Island Penitentiary Dorms Mystery



Images of two mystery sepia photos were sent to the Correction History website for historical investigation and analysis. From one of them, the above close-up section has been extracted to carry this presentation's title. The overall scene from which it was extracted and enlarged is reproduced below:



The other mystery photo image received has been cropped on top and bottom (not its sides) to fit immediately below:



From it, the enlarged the section below was exacted:



The two overall scenes and their extracted enlarged sections show the same elements but with different emphasis. The first overall scene and its enlarged detail show more buildings with wine-bottle-top shaped vents and less baseball field, whereas the second set shows mostly baseball fields but only a relative few of those buildings. In the first set, the hospital complex on North Brother Island is quite distinct but South Brothers is virtually absent, whereas in the second set South Brother is clearly visible.

The two overall scenes images were transmitted with **four questions**.

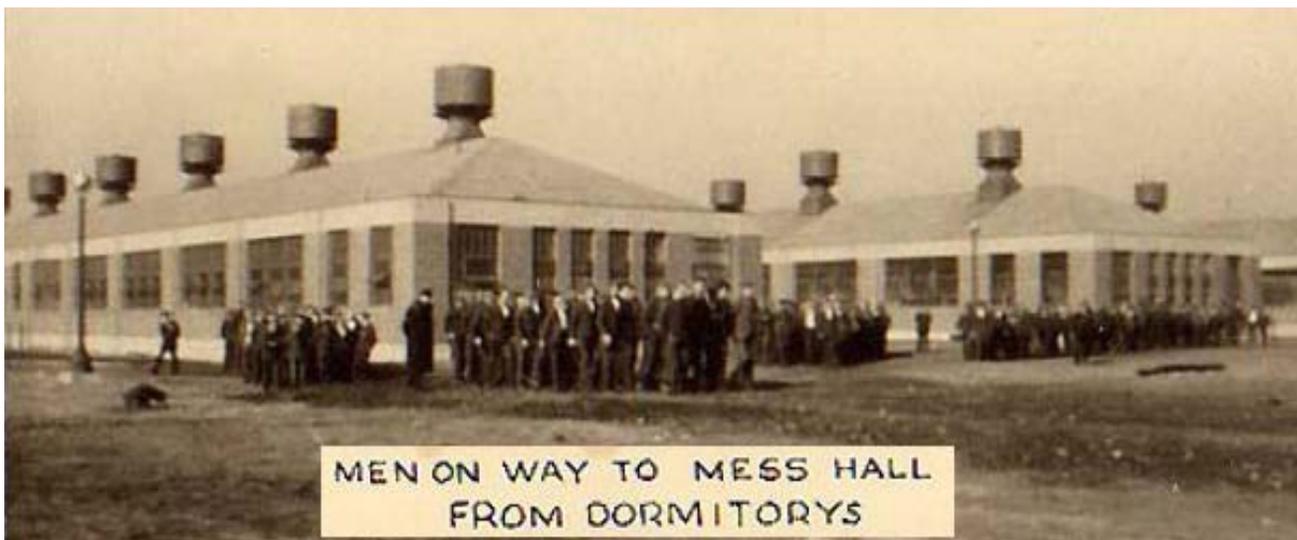
First: What were those buildings near the ball fields?

Second: Where and when were those buildings situated on Rikers Island?

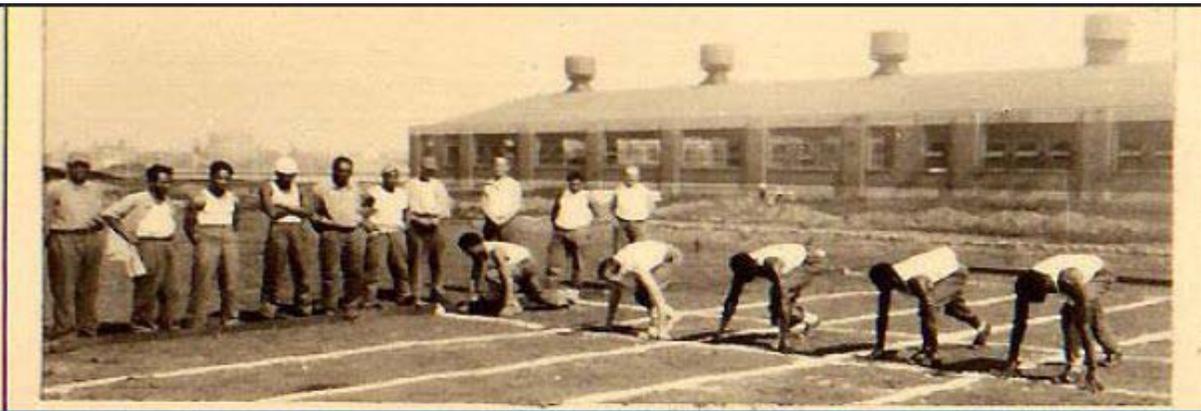
Third: What was the purpose of the photos being taken?

Fourth: When and why were the buildings removed?

The webmaster was able to answer the first question off the top of his gray-haired head: The buildings were the Rikers Island Penitentiary dorms going back to the mid-1930s. They are similar in visual detail to those seen in a PowerPoint presentation posted on the website years ago. The “slide show” displayed mid-1930s photos taken of the then newly-opened Rikers penitentiary. Here are the relevant images (including one with a misspelling from that era):



Included in the website PowerPoint were competitive sports scenes in which the dorms form part of the background. In the track event photos, the dorms are clearly present; in the baseball game pictures, less so.



The current vicinities formerly occupied by those dorms and the baseball fields were established using another presentation posted years ago on the website: an interactive 1948 aerial photo which brings up, at a mouse click, enlargements of selected sections.

Here is a NON-INTERACTIVE version of that 1948 Rikers Island aerial photo:

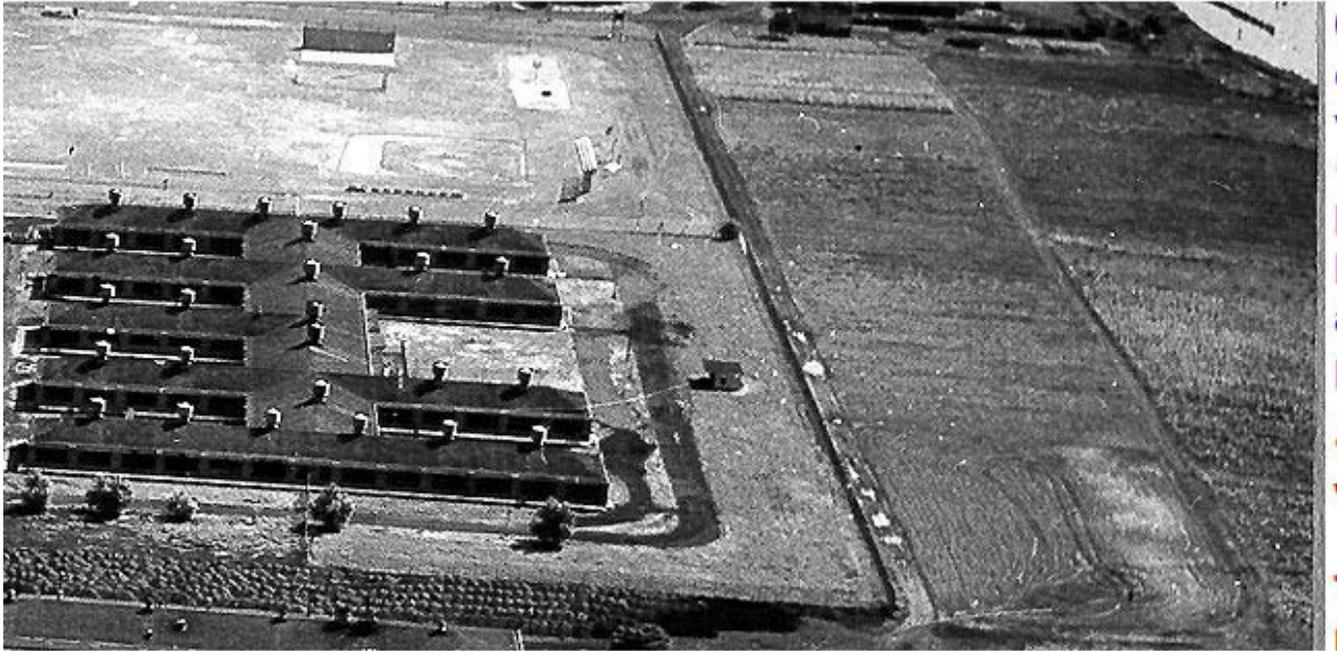


By comparing features from the 1948 aerial photo with current GPS photo details, one is able to establish that, in Rikers' northwest region, OBCC is in the general vicinity where the dorms were and West Facility is in the general vicinity where the ball fields were.

Generally speaking, the island's ferry slip area (at the bottom of the above 1948 aerial photo) is Rikers' northern most point extending into the East River. If you move your gaze up the picture, you will be able to identify the power plant area by its tall brick smoke stack and nearby water tower. To their right (west), as you look at the photo, is a large, low rectangular building with an enclosed inner courtyard. It's known as the Storehouse.

Above the Storehouse in the photo can be seen the dormitory complex (*aka* "the Dorms") with its very distinctive footprint of a common corridor "spine" from which project five extensions pointing east and four pointing west. The latter have an open courtyard between the northwest pair and southwest pair.

The dorms' identifiable configuration can be clearly seen in the detailed section accessed from the inactive aerial photo on the website. That enlargement is replicated here below.



The open and unoccupied baseball field seen here above the dormitory complex is same distant unoccupied of ball field visible in the sepia photos on Page 2 of this presentation. That page featured the overall scene which focused more on baseball fields (one in use) than on the dorms. Below is the 1948 aerial photo's close-up of the fully- engaged ball field east (left) of the open and unoccupied field.



The building in the upper left corner of the 1948 aerial section close-up above may have provided the camera perch from which the overall scenes on Pages 1 and 2 were shot.

That same building can be in the detail below, extracted from the 1948 aerial photo, for this February 2018 presentation. The arrowed line has been added to illustrate a focus.



If the photographer perched in an upper story or on the roof of the building in the upper left of the photo detail had aimed the camera facing in the direction depicted above, then the resulting picture would likely match the overall scene on Page 1 of this presentation, showing more of the dormitory complex and less of the baseball field. Whereas, if the camera were aimed as depicted below in the same section detail, the result would match the Page 2 overall scene: more ball field and fewer dorms.



Why so focused on that building in the 1948 aerial photo's upper left corner?

Answer: Because it appears to be the same building seen in a current era (2017-18) GPS photo of Rikers Island. Graphics have been added to that GBS photo section to show how that building “fits” where the photographer who took two mystery photos would have been situated to take them approximately eight (8) decades ago.

The added graphics are intended to point out that building in the GPS photo detail and to illustrate how the camera positioned from that building would have been aimed 80 or so years ago to produce the two different perspectives of the two overall scenes submitted for analysis as seen on Pages 1 and 2. One of the directional graphics passes through what seems to be the outline of the former ball fields.

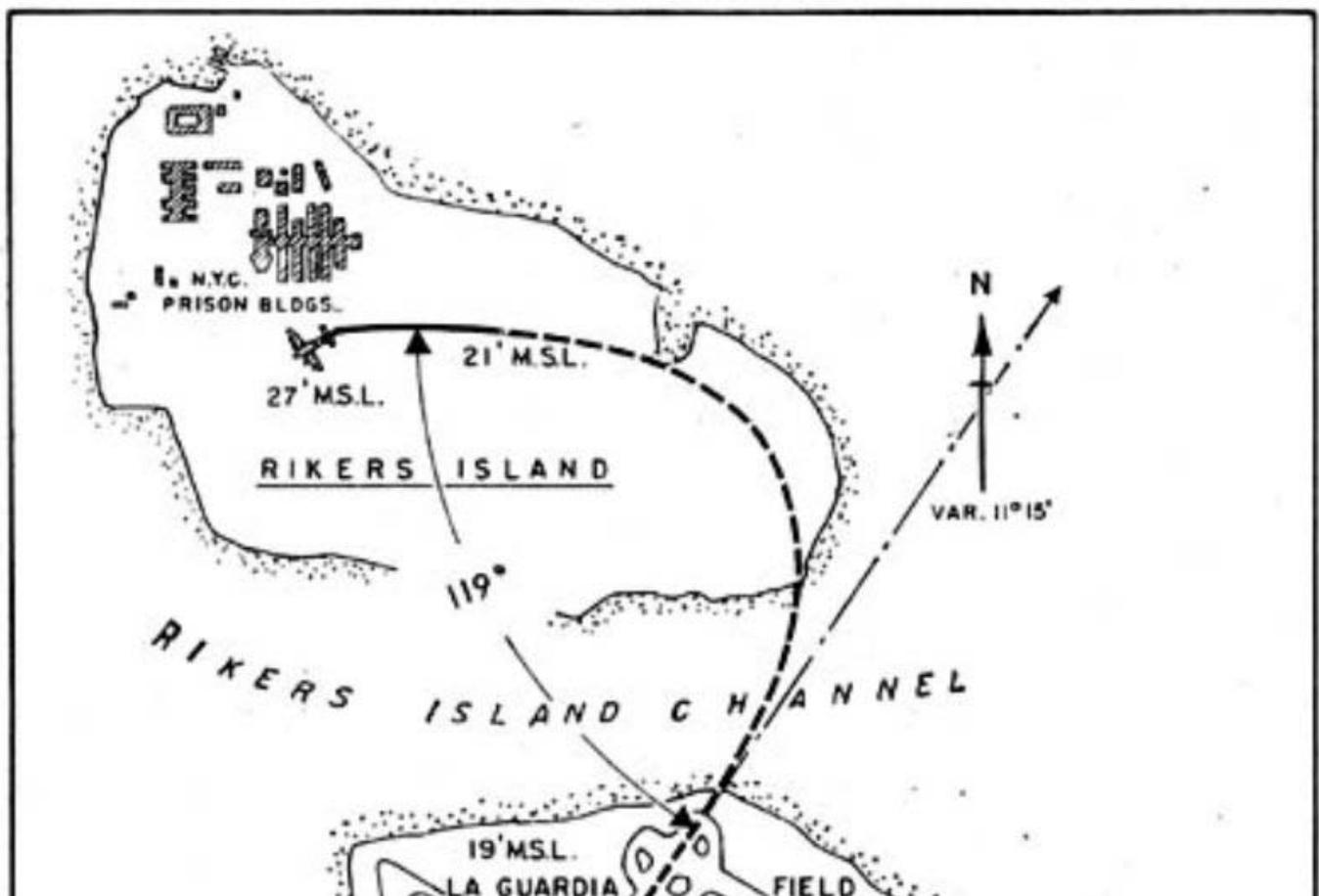


The other line passes through only a tip of what appears to be the outline of the ball fields. That graphic line passed primarily through the Otis Bantum Correctional Center.

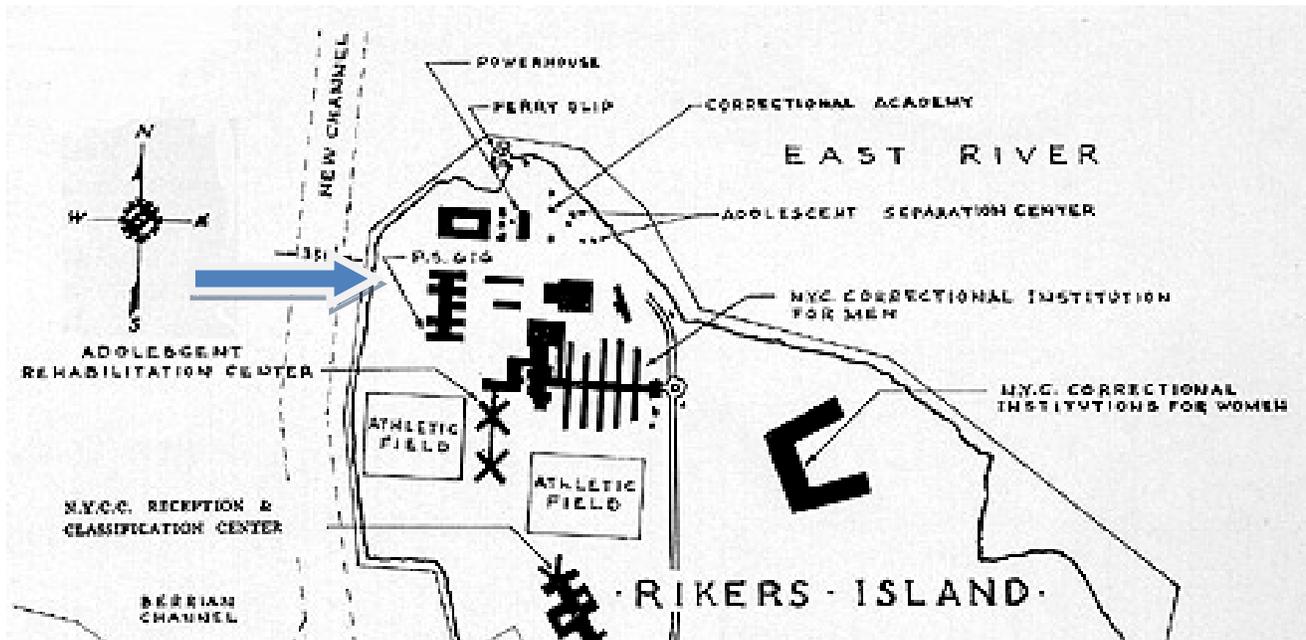
The lines drawn to illustrate in what general direction the camera was aimed to produce the two overall scenes seen on Pages 1 and 2 are not scientifically precise. They are reasoned guesses (approximations), by the webmaster/Fb admin, taking into consideration the relative position of the suspected camera location building to the ball fields, the dorm complex and the Storehouse in the 1948 aerial photo.

How long did the dorms -- seen in the mid-'30s PowerPoint photos, the 1948 aerial, and submitted photos -- last on Rikers? Research on the Correction History finds indications that the dormitory structure was a recognized feature of the Rikers scene well into the latter half of the 20th Century, although not necessarily used as dorms.

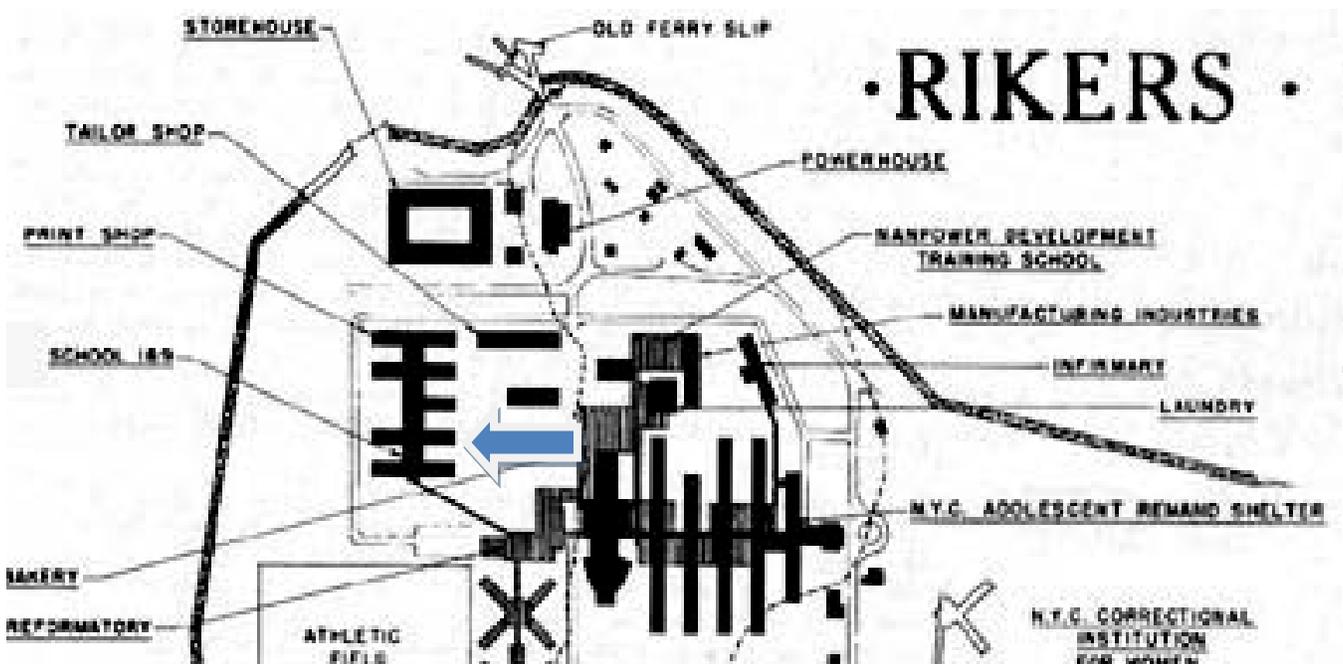
The Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) March 10, 1958 report on its investigation of the Feb. 1, 1957 airliner crash on the island included a flight path diagram that clearly shows the distinctive footprint of the dormitory complex situated south of the rectangular Storehouse and northwest of the Penitentiary's main structure:



In a three-part presentation about the various “C-76 Aliases: Workhouse, CRCC, CIFM and EMTC,” the Correction History website displayed two Rikers Island maps in which the distinctive dormitory complex footprint appears: one from 1963 and the other, 1968.



In order to point out the distinctive dormitory complex footprint, this presentation has added blue arrow graphic to the above map of Rikers Island from the 1963 DOC annual report That map identifies the structure, or at least part of it, as P.S. 616, one of the Board of Education’s “600 Schools.” The other map, below, from a 1968 DOC Correction Sidelights magazine issue, identifies the dormitory complex footprint as the “Print Shop.”



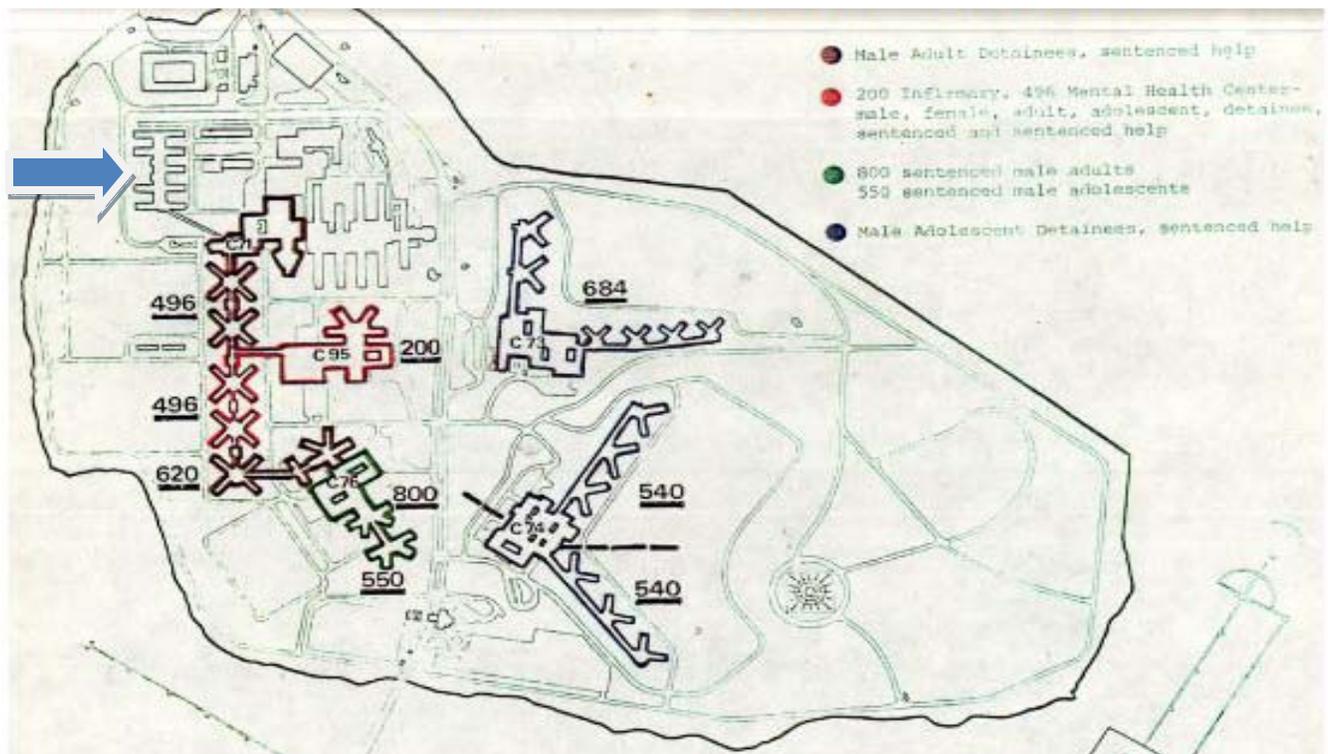
The dorm complex is visible in aerials and maps included in the website’s presentation of *Rikers Island: Past, Present, Future* by Public Works Department Division Engineer Ted K. Raderman from *The Municipal Engineers Journal* third quarterly issue of 1972.



Figure 2 — View of Old Ferry Slip.

The above aerial representation of Rikers Island from Public Works Department Engineer Raderman's the 1972 article includes the dormitory complex (blue arrow added here).

The map below, which includes the dormitory footprint (see blue arrow added here), is from the September 1980 DOC capital planning report, *Jails for the 80s*.



Given that OBCC opened in June, 1985 (after a speedy construction period of about a year and a half), one might reasonably suspect that the dormitory complex, which began in the mid-1930s as an annex to the original Penitentiary, was removed sometime in the early 1980s to make way for a new facility.



But nailing that down would be more satisfy for those of us who like their history with all the t's crossed and i's dotted.

Members of the NY Correction History Facebook group (1,800+ membership), the website's social media extension, as well as other regular visitors to website are asked to share any additional information they may have about the history of the old Penitentiary dormitory complex, including but not limited to when and why of its removal.

The information can be posted on the New York Correction History Facebook group page as a comment on this, or sent to the group admin (Thomas McCarthy) via Fb message, or sent to CorrectionHistory@gmail.com

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