

MARE ISLAND NAVAL SHIPYARD, MAGAZINE A-1  
Vallejo  
Solano County  
California

HABS No. CA-1543-B

HABS  
CAL,  
48-MAR 1,  
11B-

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

**WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

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ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE California		COUNTY Solano	TOWN OR VICINITY <del>Mare Island</del> VALLEJO
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) Mare Island Naval Shipyard, Magazine A-1			HABS NO. CA-1543-B
SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE			
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES)			
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) 1857		ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE)	
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) Part of naval complex			
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE)			
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) Sandstone ashlar			
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE) One story, rectangular			
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE Gable roof, elaborate sculpture over doorway signed "P. Kennedy"			
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED)			
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES			
PRESENT CONDITION AND USE			
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE			
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) National Register of Historic Places			
COMPILER, AFFILIATION Melissa McDonald HABS Historian			DATE 7-20-83

Addendum to:  
Mare Island Naval Shipyard,  
Magazine (Building A1)  
Railroad Avenue, west side near Maseda Road  
Vallejo  
Solano County  
California

HABS  
CAL  
48-MARI,  
IB-

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

**WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA**

**Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Western Region  
Department of the Interior  
San Francisco, California 94107**

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Addendum to  
MARE ISLAND NAVAL SHIPYARD  
Magazine #1 (Building A1)

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Data page 1 was previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

- Location:** Mare Island Naval Shipyard, Vallejo, California  
Railroad Avenue, west side near Maseda Road
- Significance:** Building A1 is a contributing element of the Mare Island Historic District. Building A1 is one of the key elements of the historic Mare Island Naval Shipyard. Its significance is measured in superlatives. It is significant historically as the second oldest building at Mare Island, as the oldest naval magazine facility on the West Coast, and as one of the oldest military buildings anywhere in California. It is also the key building in the Ammunition Depot area of Mare Island, one of the more important functional elements in the operations of the shipyard. Architecturally, Building A1 is the best example of the early sandstone masonry construction used in the Ammunition Depot.
- Present Owner:** U.S. Navy, EFA West  
900 Commodore Drive  
San Bruno, CA 94066
- Present Use:** Vacant
- Last Use:** Magazine
- Description:** Building A1 is a masonry magazine, located at the rear of a cluster of 19<sup>th</sup> century magazines near the southeastern tip of Mare Island. It was the first magazine built on the island and was fitted at the western extreme of a small natural flat. In ensuing decades the rest of that flat would also be filled with masonry magazines; the context for Building A1 is shown in Photograph B-5; Building A1 is at the center background of that photograph.
- Building A1 is a rectangular one-story structure with a gable roof. It is constructed with buff sandstone walls and metal trusses and roofing. The masonry is coursed ashlar set on a smooth watertable with quoins at the corners. The general appearance of the facade

and south elevations is shown in Photograph B-7. The stones are pick faced and toothed chisel edged. There are two wooden doors faced with one half inch of plate, cinched with strap pintle hinges. The original building had a single opening trimmed with quoins, and a brick lining with vaulted brick ceiling and a wood framed slate covered roof. Ventilation ports were placed in the end walls. The south wall and the roof of the building were destroyed by explosion in 1901. A wreathed eagle astride an anchor, sculptured in gray sandstone, ornaments the central doorways. It is shown in detail in Photograph B-12. Available documentation indicates that the bulk of the materials in the building date to the original 1857 construction and that the partial reconstruction of the building in 1901 replicated the original in terms of design and materials.

**Historical Context:** Building A1 is one of the key elements of the historic Mare Island Naval Shipyard. Its significance is measured in superlatives. It is significant historically as the second oldest building at Mare Island, as the oldest naval magazine facility on the West Coast, and as one of the oldest military buildings anywhere in California. It is also the key building in the Ammunition Depot area of Mare Island, one of the most important functional elements in the operations of the shipyard. Architecturally, Building A1 is the best example of the early sandstone masonry construction used in the Ammunition Depot. The care taken in the design of this building, including the wreathed-eagle detail at the entrance, illustrates the best of the design tradition of the Bureau of Yards and Docks in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in which even the most utilitarian buildings were treated as objects of public display. This tradition, in evidence throughout Mare Island, is illustrated in the treatment of Building A1.

The Ammunition Depot was added to Mare Island very early in the history of the shipyard. Like so many other functional areas of the station, the Ammunition Depot was added to Mare Island almost by default, because the Navy had no other usable site for this function. The Ammunition Depot, however, was also an integrated element of the shipyard in the sense that there was a need for a site to store temporarily the ordnance from ships that came to the dry docks for repair.

In 1856, Mare Island's first commandant, David G. Farragut, received a request from the Acting Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance and Hydrography to temporarily store ordnance material

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at Mare Island. Around the same time, the Bureau of Yards and Docks also asked for recommendations for a site for a magazine to store ordnance from ships under repair at the Navy Yard. Farragut chose the southern end of the island as the location of the Ammunition Depot. The site was chosen for two reasons: warships could easily unload their ordnance there for storage before proceeding to the shipyard for repairs; and the bluffs of up to 300 feet provided the shipyard buildings and personnel natural protection in case of an explosion.

In January 1857, work began on Magazine A1, apparently by the same masons who had constructed the Benicia Arsenal, an Army ordnance depot in Suisun Bay. The masonry blocks used in this building, like the foundations of Buildings 46, other industrial shops, and the 1869 hospital, reportedly all came from a quarry on Angel Island. When completed later that same year, the sandstone structure became the first naval magazine on the West Coast. The following year two brick shell houses (Buildings A3 and A4) were built at the site. In 1860, the oldest residence still standing on Mare Island, Building A45, was built on the bluffs above the Ammunition Depot as a residence for the Chief Gunner. During the Civil War, an earthwork redoubt and small brick magazine were built on the headlands above to protect the depot from attack.

The original function of the Ammunition Depot was to store ordnance belonging to ships stopping at Mare Island for repairs. During this time period, the Navy issued each ship its ordnance individually. This meant that the ordnance essentially belonged to that ship and that each ship's crew was responsible for the condition of their ammunition. When a ship put into Mare Island, its first stop was at the Ammunition Depot wharf at the southern end of the island. There the crew would unload all explosive material from the vessel, after which the ship could continue on up the strait to the shipyard. Once the ordnance was unloaded from the ship, the black powder was removed from the shells and stored in the magazine (Building A1), and the empty shells were stacked outside, fuse hole down to prevent moisture buildup. Loaded shells ready to be returned to their vessels were stored in the shell houses (Buildings A3 and A4). These structures were also where crews would reload their empty shells with black powder.

Given its rather limited function and the relatively few warships in the Pacific Squadron at the time (seven to 14 vessels), the

Ammunition Depot remained rather small during most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Aside from the buildings described above, the depot required few other structures. The size of the Ammunition Depot would remain relatively static until after 1892 when the Navy instituted changes in policy of ordnance handling.

In terms of building technologies, Ammunition Depot buildings from this period are of stone or brick, with only very small openings owing to the fact that most are ordnance magazines. As with the shipyard buildings at Mare Island, the use of masonry construction was typical for the period. Among the early magazines, Building A1 is most distinctive because it is a sandstone structure and because it was so carefully ornamented, with quoins at the corners and wreathed eagle ornamentation at the doorway. It stands as one of the more handsome pre-Civil War stone buildings in California, despite damage it suffered in a 1901 explosion. Buildings A3 and A4 are in brick with timber trusses. Although plain by comparison with Building A1, the brickwork is as handsome as any found in the Shipyard area. The third pre-Civil War building in this area, Building A45, is distinctive chiefly as the oldest residence and oldest timber building on the base.

The Ammunition Depot would continue to grow, particularly during World War II, with most new construction occurring to the south of the original depot. Building A1 is in a cluster of 19<sup>th</sup> century magazines which together comprise one of the key architectural elements of the Mare Island shipyard. Building A1 is arguably the most important building in that area, historically as well as architecturally. Simply stated, it is one of the most important buildings at Mare Island and is a key element of the surviving stock of historic military buildings in California.

**Sources:** (See list of sources under HABS Narrative Report for Mare Island Naval Shipyard Historic District.)

**Project  
Information:**

The action causing this documentation to be undertaken is the disposal of historic properties at Mare Island Naval Shipyard in accordance with the Base Realignment and Closure Act, as amended in 1993. Once the transfer occurs, these National Register properties will no longer be afforded the protection of the National Historic Preservation Act. This documentation is a requirement of the MOA among the Navy, SHPO and ACHP reached in accordance with the regulation for the "Protection of

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Historic Properties,” (36 CFR Part 800) implementing Section 106  
of the National Historic Preservation Act.

