

DEER ISLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION
Deer Island (northeast and northwest quadrants)
Boston
Suffolk County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-1250

HABS
MASS
13-BOST,
144-

-PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Northeast Field Area
Chesapeake/Allegheny System Support Office
National Park Service
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DEER ISLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION HABS No. MA-1250

Location: Deer Island, northeast and northwest quadrants,
City of Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts.

U.S.G.S. HULL, MA Quadrangle (1971) Universal
Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 19.338500.4690700 (A)
19.338140.4690640 (B)

Present Owner: City of Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts.

Present Use: Deer Island House of Correction, prison complex.

Significance: The five story brick and granite Hill Prison, built in 1904 (HABS No. MA-1250 A), has significance to both architectural and social history of the Boston area. The Hill (originally Womens') Prison, originally described as "a model of its kind," represents the full development of the traditional Boston penal institution modernized to meet twentieth century standards. Socially, Hill Prison incorporated reform programs along with the provision of separate facilities for women inmates; educational and vocational programs were administered by chaplains and teachers.

The two and a half story brick hip-roofed Superintendent's (originally Doctor's) House of 1930 at Deer Island (HABS No. MA-1250-B) is also significant to Boston's architectural and social history. Architecturally, it is an important Colonial Revival interpretation of a Virginia Georgian mansion (Westover, built 1737) both in siting and exterior appearance. Socially, it is a public work of the administration of prominent Boston Mayor James Michael Curley, who promoted numerous civic projects for the public welfare. The exterior and many interior features of the Superintendent's House retain their integrity.

Part I. Narrative - Deer Island House of Correction

The House of Correction complex is located on Deer Island in Boston Harbor, a glacial outwash basin with island drumlins. The nearest neighbor to Deer Island is Long Island across Presidents Road, Boston Harbor's main shipping channel. The Town of Winthrop's Point Shirley is the nearest mainland access (See page 11 Locus Plan page 11). The prison complex and its environment have experienced major change over the years.

Deer Island was originally a long drumlin off "Pullin Point" (1630's), later Point Shirley (1756) across the "gut" or channel which gradually silted in during the 19th c. Since 1936, when a causeway was constructed, the island has been a peninsula (See Location Plan page 12). Signal Hill dominated the center of the island. Fort Dawes (1906) occupied the U.S. Military Reservation on the southeast side of the island and the Metropolitan Water and Sewer Board Pumping Station (HAER No. MA-120) and Locker Building (HABS No. MA-1244) and outfall (1894-1910) occupied the western side of the island.

A new sewage treatment plant (1968) was built on the island by the Metropolitan District Commission.

The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) is now (1991) in the process of constructing a new wastewater treatment facility. Fort Dawes has been acquired and demolished as of 1990, the Locker building has been recorded in 1989 by HABS and demolished in 1990, and the 1894 Deer Island Pumping Station is being renovated as part of the MWRA project. Deer Island has recently undergone extensive regrading and topographical change including the filling of Cow Pond on the north side of Signal Hill which has been cut down, altering the original setting of the prison complex.

The House of Correction complex (HABS No. MA-1250) is located at the northerly end of Deer Island facing Point Shirley (See Site Plan page 13). The complex is bounded on the east by the former Fort Dawes U.S. Military Reservation, now part of the MWRA wastewater treatment facilities currently under construction. The Prison entrance is on the causeway to Point Shirley. The

DEER ISLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION
HABS No. MA-1250 (page 3)

buildings are scattered on the site which slopes from the north shore toward former Signal Hill at the center of the island. The causeway approach leads south to the checkpoint guardhouse, then past the Work Release House on the 19th century hospital site to the 1931 Superintendent's House (HABS No. MA-1250B) and offices on the westerly shore of Deer Island facing Boston Harbor. Across the road to the east is the Administration Building (former Almshouse of 1850), and up the hillside further to the east is the 1904 Hill (Women's Prison (HABS No. MA-1250A) which faces south. The modern chapel, shower block, power plant and shops occupy the sites of the former barns and bake house between the Hill Prison and Administration Building. Ruins of the foundations of the former dwelling house, and school buildings across the driveway southwest of the Hill Prison are in the process of demolition.

The entire site surrounding the House of Correction complex, including the prison Piggery on the shore northeast of Hill Prison and Signal Hill with its reservoir in the island's center, is in the process of demolition through regrading for the construction of the MWRA's new wastewater treatment facility. The New Resthaven Cemetery of 1908, east of the Piggery on the boundary with the former U.S. military reservation, is in the process of archaeological study and review.

Deer Island's use as a place of internment began in 1676 during King Phillip's War when Christian "Praying Town" Indians were interned at a camp on the island, planting and clamming. One hundred Indians remained in detention after others were removed to Long Island and Greater Brewster Island setting the precedent for Deer Island's long history as a place of incarceration. Deer Island first served as a quarantine station for a smallpox ship's passengers in 1677. In 1717 Boston selectmen voted to lease a parcel on the island for a hospital or "pest house" for quarantine of ships' passengers, however the intensive institutional use of Deer Island as a place of detention dates primarily to the nineteenth century.

Institutional and prison complex design precedents in Boston included the Leverett Street Almshouse of 1800, the South Boston Houses of Correction and Industry of 1825, all Palladian in form with a central core and flanking wings within a walled enclosure. Subsidiary outbuildings were provided for sanitary and work purposes. These institutions each served for a period

DEER ISLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION
HABS No. MA-1250 (page 4)

of about twenty five years when they were superceded by newer buildings. Each successive building incorporated slight technological improvements into the same basic institutional form. In 1821 the Committee on Pauperism and Erecting a House of Industry considered a Deer Island site but rejected it due to its poor soil and exposed location. In 1847 Boston ended the practice of leasing land on Deer Island for "sanitary purposes"; the "Committee on Alien Passengers" then constructed a temporary Quarantine Station on the Island for immigrants. More than 10,000 Irish landed in Boston between January and July of that year; hundreds died and were buried in graves on the northeast shore of the island. The needs of these immigrants could not be met by the existing facilities on the island and new buildings were planned.

Plans for a new Almshouse (the present Prison Administration Building) were developed in 1848 by architects Gridley J.F. Bryant and Louis Dwight. In 1854 the Deer Island Almshouse became the House of Industry; the state then relieved the city of its welfare burden and removed the poor to the new State Almshouse. Boston's Charles Street Jail of 1850 and the Deer Island Almshouse provided the precedents for later penal institutional buildings on Deer Island. In 1858 the Boston Board of Directors of Public Institutions located the House of Reformation and Almshouse School for 160 boys on the island

In 1900, two city institutions remained on Deer Island: the House of Industry (for adults) and the School for Pauper Girls. By 1904 when the new Women's (Hill) Prison was built, the Deer Island Prison complex was the largest in the state with 1,793 prisoners.

A plan prepared in 1904 by the City of Boston for the St. Louis Exposition shows numerous outbuildings including the new "House of Correction" with a dormitory, dwelling and greenhouse opposite, two nearby barns, a carriage house, hennery and workshops. Near the "Main Building" (1850 Almshouse) were a laundry and powerhouse, Physician's House, and Hospital. Toward the dock at the north end of the island were a boatman's cottage, workshops, dwelling, bakeshop, powerhouse, and cell house. On the west side was a wharf with stone sheds, stone house, coal shed, and receiving office; a piggery was near the southern end of the island.

DEER ISLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION
HABS No. MA-1250 (page 5)

From 1850 to 1890 these institutions formed a self-sufficient community of 1,200 to 1,500 persons. In 1868 a new brick building was occupied by pauper boys and a remodelled dairy building by girls. A new "Pauper Boys School" building was built in 1870; the site of the future Hill (Women's) Prison of 1904 was considered for a new almshouse then as well. By 1876, 93 Pauper and 58 neglected children were enrolled at the Deer Island School. The boys were moved to the Marcella Street House in Roxbury the following year making this the Deer Island School for Pauper Girls. In 1878, three city institutions were on Deer Island: the House of Industry (for adults), the House of Reformation (for juveniles), and the School for Pauper Girls. In 1895 the "House for Employment and Reformation of Juvenile Offenders" was removed to Rainsford Island.

In 1890 land was taken for the Metropolitan Sewage Pumping Station and outfall pipe by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from the City of Boston. The Metropolitan Sewage Pumping Station Engine and Boiler Rooms were built in 1894; additions were made including the Coal and Screen Houses 1896, and Engine Room and Coal House Extensions in 1909 (HAER No. MA-120) and Locker Building (HABS No. MA-1244). In 1895 Mack and Moore Builders filed a permit to build a new prison "Cell House" designed by Winslow and Wetherall, northeast of the "Main Building" (Administration Building, old Almshouse of 1850) shown on the 1904 plan. The Hill (Women's) Prison (HABS MA-1250 A) was built in 1904.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers acquired the southwest corner of Deer Island in 1906; a plan of that date shows a rectangular concrete reservoir on top of Signal Hill as well as a pest house, piggery, and Resthaven Cemetery on the southern end of the island. The Taft Fortification Board proposed gun emplacements in 1907 along with fire control stations and a dormitory on the slopes of Signal Hill. As a result, old Resthaven Cemetery was moved from the southern end of the island to the new Resthaven Cemetery on the northeast, behind the Hill Prison. The Stone Mausoleum was built north of the Women's (Hill) Prison in 1908. The House of Correction leased U.S. government land for grazing its animals in 1909. In 1910, concrete seawalls were built on the northeast shore behind Hill prison (See Location Plan page 12).

DEER ISLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION
HABS No. MA-1250 (page 6)

A 1923 plan in a "Report of a Special Commission ...relative to the Relocation of the State Prison" numbered 37 different structures on the city and commonwealth's portions of the island, keyed into a schedule with "Description of Building" (see HABS No. MA-1244). Fire destroyed the top floors of the Old Prison and Doctor's House wing (present Administration Building) in 1929 setting the stage for the construction of the new Doctor's House later known as the Commissioner's house and now the Superintendent's House. The brick Georgian Revival Doctor's House (Superintendent's House, HABS No. MA-1250B) was constructed in 1930 by the city to plans of M.A. Dyer Company, architects and engineers. Continuous silting of Shirley Gut led to the construction of the causeway connecting Deer Island with Point Shirley in 1936. The Administration Building was again damaged by fire in 1949 and rebuilt. Other twentieth century additions to the prison structures include a sheet metal shop, garage and a piggery. Renovations were made to the Hill (Women's) Prison (HABS No. MA-1250 A) in 1976 and to the Superintendent's (Doctor's) House (HABS NO. MA-1250 B) in 1985.

Several important nationally known and locally prominent architects and builders are associated with the Deer Island House of Correction complex. The plans for the 1850 Almshouse (the present Prison Administration building) were begun in 1848 by architects Gridley J.F. Bryant and Louis Dwight. Bryant is nationally known for his Granite-Style buildings. The Boston Granite Style of building (1840's to 1870's) with large rusticated granite elements reflected the technical progress in masonry quarrying and construction. Bryant's monumental civic and mercantile buildings set the national standard. His numerous works include city halls, jails, court and custom houses as well as churches and commercial buildings throughout New England and elsewhere. Among his more noted buildings are the 1850 Charles Street Jail and the Boston City Hall of 1861-5. In 1895 Mack and Moore, Builders constructed the new prison "Cell House" designed by Winslow and Wetherall, noted Boston architects of commercial structures such as the 1903 Board of Trade Building.

The 1904 Hill (Women's) Prison (HABS NO. MA-1250A) was built by Mack & Moore to the 1901 design of A. Warren Gould, a pioneer in reinforced concrete construction who moved soon thereafter to Seattle; French and Hubbard were engineers for the building.

DEER ISLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION
HABS No. MA-1250 (page 7)

The architects of the Superintendent's (Doctor's) House of 1931 (HABS No. MA-1250B) were Michael A. Dyer Co. Later changes to the complex included Masiello & Associates, Architects' plans for the renovation of the Hill Prison in 1976, and Richard H. Walwood, Architect, Inc.'s renovation of the Superintendent's House in 1985.

Other notable persons are connected with the Deer Island House of Correction. Mrs. Florence Garrettson Spooner represented the Women's Prison Association that was involved with inmate services at the time of the construction of Hill (Women's) Prison (HABS NO. MA-1250A) in 1904. Mr. Louis K. Rourke was Building Commissioner and Edward W. Roemer Supervisor of Construction at the time of the 1929 fire and subsequent construction in 1930-31 of the Superintendent's (Doctor's) House (HABS No. MA-1250B) under the aegis of prominent Boston Mayor James Michael Curley. In 1930, Philip A. Chapman was Penal Institutions Commissioner and G.F.A. Mulcahy was Master of Suffolk County House of Correction with William G. O'Hare, Penal Institutions Commissioner in 1931.

Jurisdiction of the prison subsequently shifted to the Suffolk County Corrections Department in 1931. A 1935 report on conditions at the prison was made by Frank M. Curley, then Supervisor of construction. Subsequent to the expected 1991 closing of the prison, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) is expected to take title to the Deer Island House of Correction as part of its planned wastewater treatment facility, now under construction (See photo HABS No. MA-1250-1). The MWRA plans to demolish the House of Correction complex including the Hill Prison (with the exception of the Superintendent's House) to permit the construction of this vast new wastewater treatment facility.

Part II. Sources of Information

A. Original Engineering and Architectural Drawings of the House of Correction Complex.

The Boston Public Library has printed plans of the 1850 Almshouse (present prison Administration Building) by Gridley Bryant (CAB 60.198.3).

DEER ISLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION
HABS No. MA-1250 (page 8)

Drawings of the Hill (Women's) Prison (HABS No. MA-1250A) of 1904 and the Superintendent's (Doctor's) House (HABS No. MA-1250A) of 1930 are in the collections of the Boston Public Facilities Department.

Other records, permits and reports are in the Boston Building Department Collection.

B. Early Views

Early views have been located at the Winthrop Public Library, Boston Public Library, and Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, as well as in Newspapers cited in the Bibliography.

C. Interviews

Interviews took place with staff of the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, Metropolitan District Commission, and the Corrections Department; these are cited in the following chapters on individual complex buildings.

D. Bibliography.

1. Primary and unpublished sources

Boston Inspectional Services Department. Deer Island Jackets I-IV. Applications for Permit to Build for 1895 Prison Cell block by Winslow and Wetherell, architects; and 1901 House of Correction Women's (Hill) Prison by A. Warren Gould.

Boston Inspectional Services Department. Jackets No. I to IV for Deer Island. Letter Report, Edwin K. Roemer, Supervisor of Construction to Louis K. Rourke, Building Commissioner, re: Fire at Deer Island House of Correction including the Main Building and Doctor's House, 16 July 1929.

Boston Public Facilities, Archives, 26 Court Street, 6th floor office; Archivist, 15 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108. The plans for the 1976 renovation of Hill Prison by Masiello and Associates, architects, 71 Elm Street, Worcester, are on file in the basement vault at 26 Court Street.

DEER ISLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION
HABS No. MA-1250 (page 9)

Boston Public Library, Fine Arts. Index of Architects including A. Warren Gould and reference to obituary, The Architect and Engineer, October, 1922; index card notes on work in and around Boston.

Historic American Buildings Survey. Report on the Deer Island Pumping Station Locker Building (Barn) HABS No. MA-1244, Fannin Lehner, Preservation Consultants, 1989.

Massachusetts Historical Commission. Survey Form B for Hill Prison, Deer Island House of Correction. September 1985.

Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), Schrafft Library. "Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey of Deer Island, Boston Harbor, Massachusetts," by the Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc., 217 Angell Street, Providence, RI, for Camp, Dresser and McKee, Inc., One Center Plaza, Boston, MA, March 1986; Historic Survey of Deer Island House of Correction and Pumping Station, by Stanley Moss, David Amorena, and Pauline Chase Harrell for Camp, Dresser & McKee, Inc. Revised 23 October 1985.

Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA). "Secondary Treatment Facilities Plan, Facilities Planning Background, Vol. II, Draft Report" September 15, 1987. Includes update on environmental impact data, especially with regard to Historical and Archaeological Resources including New Resthaven Cemetery.

Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. A ca. 1905 view of the prison ferry, the steamer "Monitor" (the seal of the City of Boston is on its side wheel cover) built at the time of the construction of the Hill (Women's) Prison, is in the Stebbins Marine Photograph Collection.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Boston City Documents - Annual Report of the City of Boston, Penal Institution Department Reports, Reports of the Commissioner, 1901-1905.

Fahey, Joseph J., Ed. Boston's Forty-five Mayors. City of Boston: Printing Plant, 1975/1979. Background on Boston mayors.

DEER ISLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION
HABS No. MA-1250 (page 10)

Kales, Emily and David. All about the Boston Harbor Islands
Hingham, MA: Hewitts Cove Publishing Co., Inc. (1976,
1980, 1983) 1989 edition. Views of House of Industry and
Convicts at Work, pp. 28-29).

Shurtleff, Nathaniel B. A Topographical and Historical Description
of Boston Boston: Noyes, Holmes & Co., 1872. A chapter on
Deer Island gives a good topographical history, pp. 462-471.

Snow, Edward Rowe. The Islands of Boston Harbor, 1630-1971. New
York: Dodd Mead & Co. (1936, 1971) 1984 edition. General
history of Harbor and Deer Island, pp. 197-212.

Stott, Peter. A Guide to the Industrial Archeology of Boston
Proper, 1630-1971. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1984.

Sullivan, Robert F. - Shipwrecks and Nautical Lore of Boston
Harbor. Chester, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 1990. Nautical
lore of the harbor including Deer Island, pp. 105-108. A
nineteenth-century view of Deer Island Hospital, p. 109.

Sweetser, M.F. - Kings Handbook of Boston Harbor. Boston:
1988; Reprint, Applewood Books, 1988. A chapter on "The
Penal Colony of Deer Island" with views of the "House of
Industry" and "Convicts at Work" cutting stone, pp. 219,
221.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

Sources which might yield further information on the history
of Deer Island structures include: the Boston Public
Library Rare Books Department for early, unpublished Town
Records; the Massachusetts Archives for other unpublished
material on the early period of Deer Island (no later
material relating to the Hill Prison was found); Suffolk
County Court Records may have additional information; Boston
Globe and Herald Photo archives are a likely source for news
coverage of late nineteenth and twentieth century events at
Deer Island.

Not yet found is one paper cited in other sources:

Sullivan, F. V.A. "Historical Study of Deer Island from
1630 to 1968," May 1969. Unpublished college thesis, 90

DEER ISLAND HOUSE OF CORRECTION
HABS No. MA-1250 (page 11)

pages, on deposit at Master's office, Suffolk County House of Correction. Copy (not found) "available from Dr. Roth," (institution not identified).

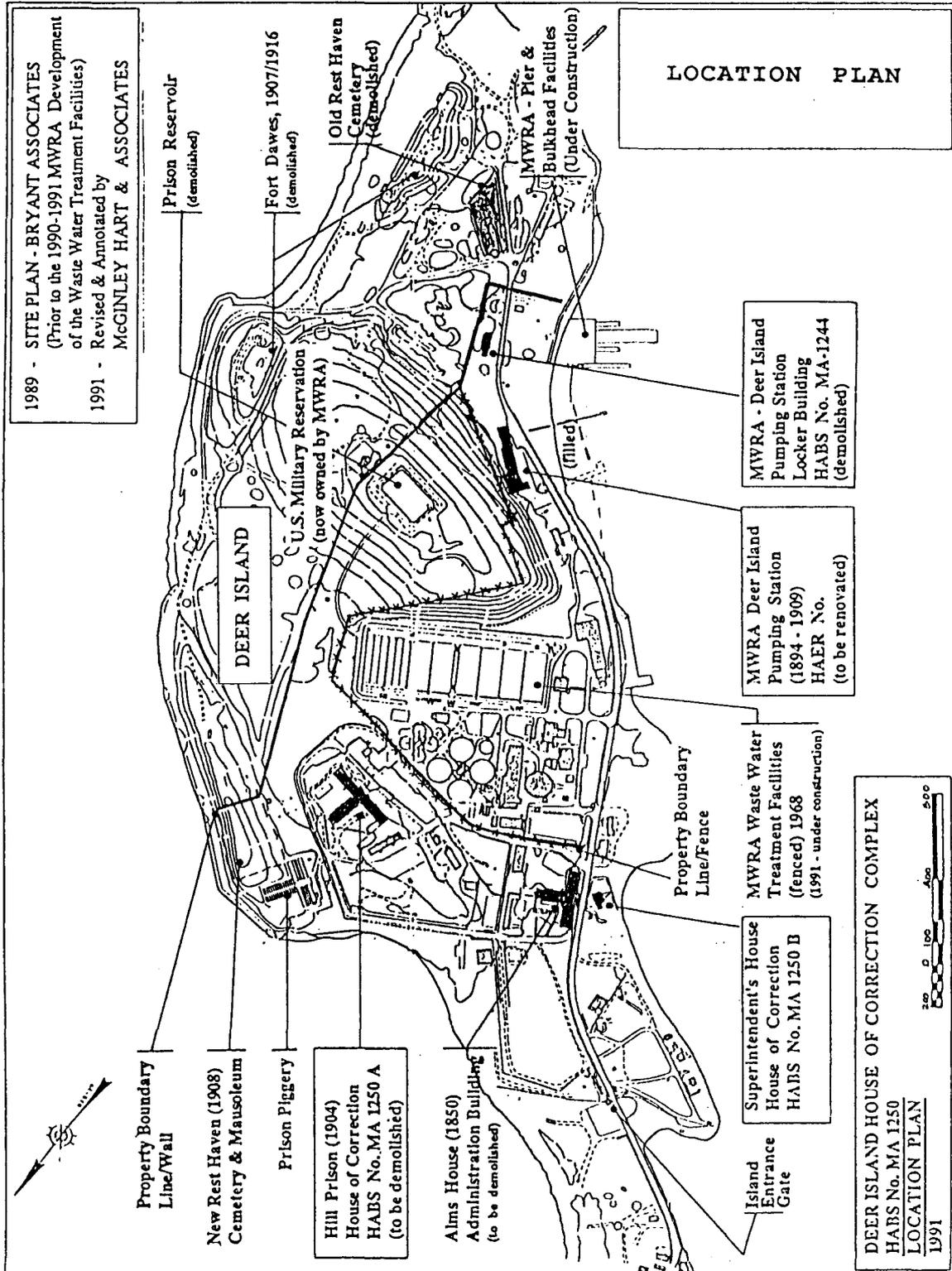
Part III. Project Information

This documentation was undertaken by Frederic C. Detwiller, Janice E. Slivko, Wendall C. Kalsow, David M. Hart and Paul J. McGinley of McGinley Hart & Associates during 1990 as a mitigation measure prior to the replacement of the prison by a new wastewater treatment facility by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority. The documentation is undertaken in compliance with a Memorandum of Agreement dated September 21, 1988 between the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region I; the Massachusetts Historical Commission; the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority; and the Massachusetts Division of Water Pollution Control.

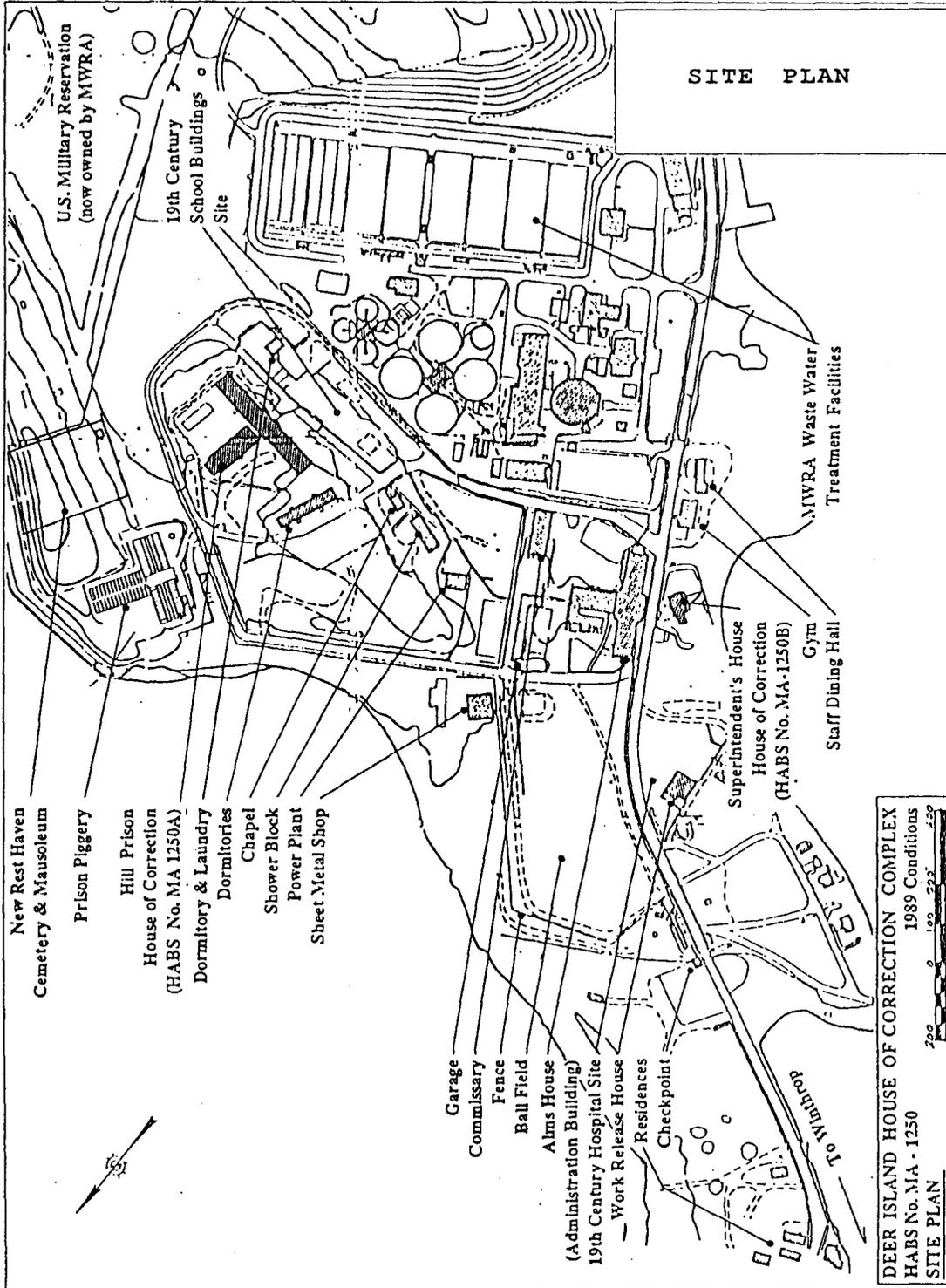
LOCUS PLAN
HULL, MASSACHUSETTS (Reduced)



LOCATION PLAN



SITE PLAN



Site Plan - Existing (McGinley Hart & Associates)