

FORT RODMAN MILITARY RESERVATION, GAS CHAMBER
(Fort Rodman Military Reservation, Building T-75)
Eastern side of main access road
New Bedford
Bristol County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MA-1256-D

HABS
MASS
3-NEBED,
27D-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

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Location: Eastern side of main access road
Fort Rodman Military Reservation
New Bedford, Bristol County, Massachusetts

USGS Quadrangle: New Bedford, South
UTM Coordinates: 19.341440.4606350

Present Owner: City of New Bedford
Municipal Building
133 William Street
New Bedford, 02740

Occupant: Sea Lab - New Bedford School Department Summer Program
Boat Storage/Bathhouse

Significance: The Gas Chamber Building retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and workmanship. It was built specially for training troops in gas mask use during World War II, a major event in this country's history. In addition, as part of a coastal installation during the final period of coastal fortifications, it contributes to the existing Fort Taber National Register District, which is significant because it is "representative of the development of American coastal fortifications from the Revolutionary period through the mid-20th century."

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1941 - 45
2. Architect: United States Army Corps of Engineers
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: United States Army - City of New Bedford
4. Builder: United States Army
5. Original Plans:
6. Alterations and Additions: None

B. Historical Context

The Gas Chamber building was built sometime between 1941 and 1945, but whether it was constructed according to a standardized plan or whether it is a design unique to Fort Rodman is not clear. It was originally used to test gas masks to familiarize soldiers with their use; tear gas canisters were set off in the building and the soldiers, wearing masks, spent about five minutes inside. After the war, the building was used for a time as a bathhouse and it was probably in this period that the shower heads were installed. The building now serves as a bathhouse.

According to the database prepared by the Army study documenting World War II buildings, there are only 13 gas chamber-type buildings still standing on Army property. If this is accurate, it would, of course, mean that the Gas Chamber at Fort Rodman is an important cultural resource.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. **Architectural Character:** The Gas Chamber building at Fort Rodman is a good example of a "temporary" structure built during World War II.
2. **Condition of Fabric:** The building is generally in good condition. Except for the replacement of the original doors and windows and the addition of the shower heads, the building appears to retain most of its original features and finishes.

B. Description of Exterior/Interior

The present structure is one story, three-by-two bays, and has a gable roof covered with asphalt shingles, the exterior clad with wood drop siding (a form of tongue-and-groove boards laid horizontally), and a cement slab foundation.

The front has a center double door and, to the left, three small high windows (now boarded up); the left gable end has a small triangular vent in the peak of the gable and two pairs of the small high windows, again boarded. On the back side is another center double door flanked by small high triple windows on either side. The right gable end has a smaller triangular vent in the peak of the gable and two pairs of small high windows; in the center are shower heads attached to the side of the building.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Specifications

CERL (Construction Engineering Research Lab)
Database printout. Construction Engineering Research Laboratory, Corps of Engineers,
P.O. Box 4005, Champaign, IL 61824-4005

Historical Information

Seasholes, Nancy
Office of Public Archeology - Boston University
Architectural Inventory of the Fort Rodman Military Reservation in New Bedford, MA
Office of Public Archeology Report of Investigations No. 72

Site Plans

Post Engineer's Office
1945 Fort Rodman: Water System. Map on file at the U.S. Army Base, Fort Rodman,
New Bedford, MA

Quartermaster's Corps

1941 Fort Rodman: Sewer Systems and Drainage. Map on File at U.S. Army Base, Fort
Rodman, New Bedford, MA

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

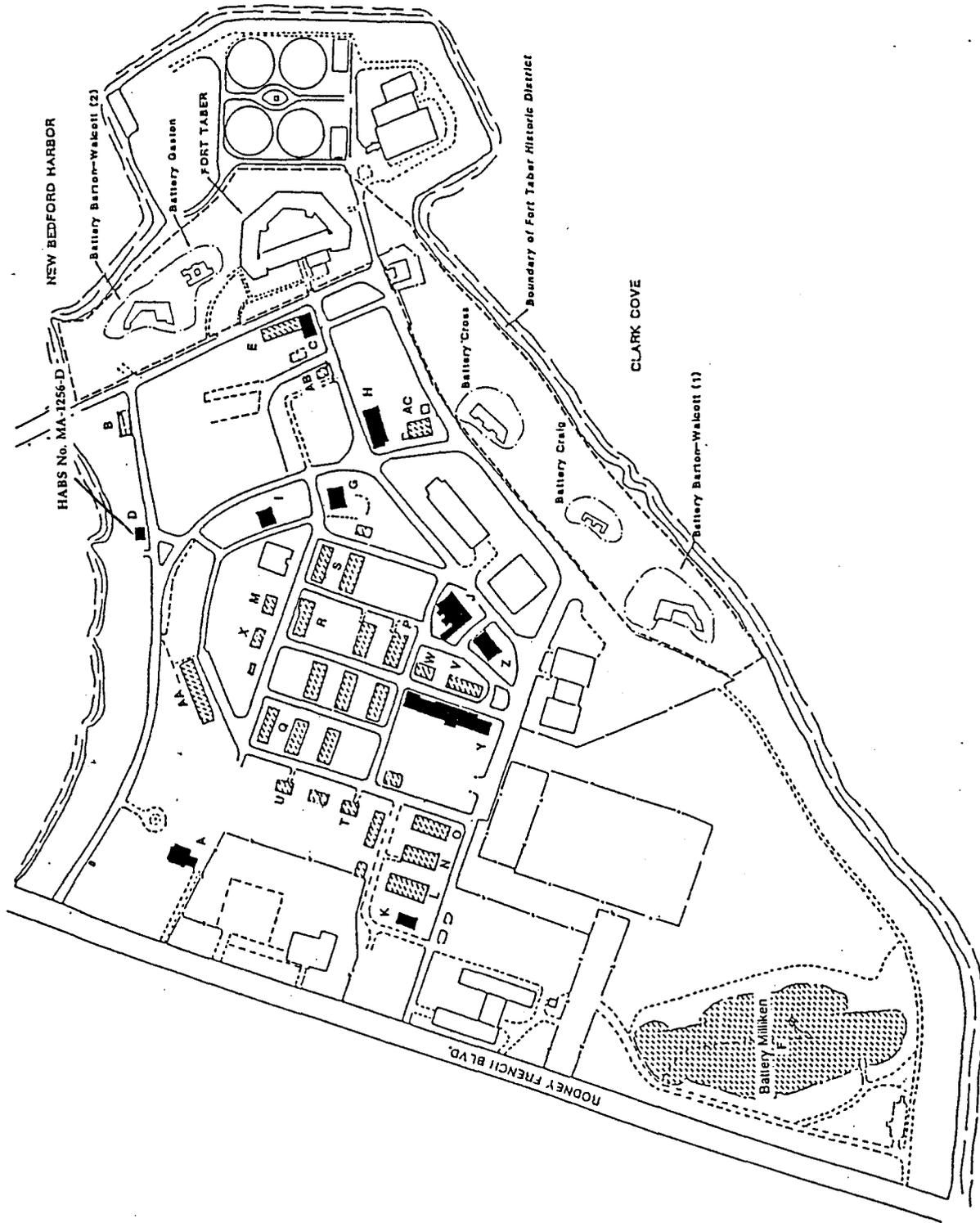
The City of New Bedford entered into a consent decree with the Environmental Protection Agency, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, and the Conservation Law Foundation in 1986 to construct a secondary wastewater treatment facility as a result of the city's violation of the Clean Water Act. The Project includes a new secondary wastewater treatment plant at Fort Rodman, decommissioning and demolition of the existing primary plant, improvements to historic Fort Taber and development of Taber Park, and rehabilitation of the existing 60-inch outfall. The majority of buildings comprising the Fort Rodman Military Reservation will be demolished; several will be retained or relocated and renovated for community purposes. Following completion of the plant, the existing primary plant will be demolished and the Fort Rodman site will be restored, including significant mitigation in the form of Taber Park. Taber Park will be a community recreational park, around the site's existing national

register-listed fort and batteries. The park will provide an appropriate setting for the historical resources of Fort Taber and the batteries, as well as recreation opportunities such as picnic areas, multipurpose playfields, and trails and paths. The Memorandum of Agreement for the Project was developed between the City of New Bedford, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, the National Park Service, the Department of the Army, and the Massachusetts Historical Commission. EPA, as enforcer of the Clean Water Act, is the primary agency for ensuring NHPA compliance. The US Army Corps of Engineers is also involved as a holder of property restrictions on the site. The National Park Service is involved due to property restrictions.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Beardsley, based on studies and documentation performed by Donald G. Jones and Nancy C. Seasholes, Office of Public Archaeology, Boston University (historical and archaeological research and analysis) and Martin Stupich (photography).

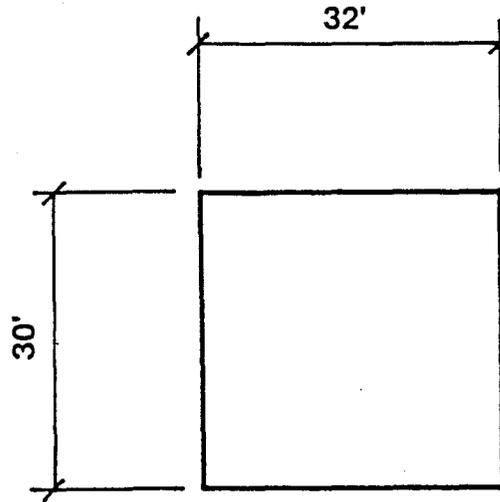
Title: Engineer
Affiliation: Camp Dresser & McKee Inc.
Date: 1992

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SCALE: 1"=20'