

FORT HANCOCK, MASTER WORKMAN'S RESIDENCE HABS No. NJ-1209-J
(Fort Hancock, Building No. 112)
On the south side of Canfield Road,
east of the Knox Road intersection
at the Fort Hancock Proving Ground
Fort Hancock
Monmouth County
New Jersey

HABS
NJ
13-FOHAN,
1J-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

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Location: On the south side of Canfield Road, east of the Knox Road intersection at the Fort Hancock Proving Ground, Fort Hancock, Monmouth County New Jersey

USGS Sandy Hook, NJ-NY Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
18 584350 4479930

Significance: This wood frame structure has been identified as the oldest extant wooden building in the Fort Hancock and Sandy Hook Proving Ground Historic District. It served as housing for the master workman of the weapons testing program at Fort Hancock. In August 1874 steps were taken by the Army's Ordnance Department to establish a Proving Ground (a testing area for military weaponry) at Sandy Hook, New Jersey. Operating on a shoestring budget, the Ordnance people moved expeditiously, and in the fourth week of October the first round was fired from a temporary proof battery. The testing facility soon became one of the Army's most important installations. The Sandy Hook Proving Ground played a vital role in the technical revolution of weaponry. All the experimental guns and carriages for the sea coast defenses of the United States from the early 1890's through World War II were tested at Sandy Hook. All the big guns and mortars and gun carriages from the nation's Endicott and Taft period coastal fortifications were developed at Sandy Hook. The Sandy Hook Proving Ground, from its establishment in 1874 until it was phased out in 1918 - 1919, had a key role in the development of weapons employed by the United States Coast Artillery and United States Field Artillery.

Description: On December 13, 1991 a fire extensively damaged Building 112. Historic descriptions of the Exterior and Interior are followed by excerpts from a Condition Assessment written after the fire.

Exterior:

Building 112 is a two-story wood frame structure. This L-shaped residence consists of a rectangular central structure, two stories tall with a flat roof. There is a single-story enclosed porch on its facade, and two wings, one of which extends to the north and the other to the west. Both wings are one story high; the north wing has a flat roof and the west wing has a low gable roof. There is a small extension built on the north end of the north wing. This attachment has concrete foundations, not the brick foundations of the rest of the house. The main house has a basement. The doors and the double hung sash windows are wood framed. The house is outfitted with aluminum storm windows.

FORT HANCOCK, MASTER WORKMAN'S RESIDENCE
(Fort Hancock, Building No. 112)
HABS No. NJ-1209-J (Page 2)

Interior:

The interior is divided into eight rooms, four of which are bedrooms and one of which is a bathroom. The interior frame partitions and the ceilings are plastered. The floors and stairways are wood.

(From the Condition Assessment prepared by September 29, 1992)

The kitchen wing and main volume of the house adjoining the kitchen wing, suffered the most destruction from fire. The pantry floor and much of the kitchen floor is completely destroyed, as are the exterior walls of the kitchen. The roof was mostly consumed by fire, and the remaining metal covering has collapsed into the space below. The garage walls are intact, but its roof, where it abuts the kitchen, is damaged. The frame wall of the main house adjoining the pantry was consumed, leaving an enormous opening into the second floor level. Because fire spread completely into the second floor attic, much of that roof has collapsed. The second floor back bedroom floor and bathroom floor is gone. Fire spread heavily throughout the entrance hall, leaving no trace to the wood staircase, or the second floor hall above. From outside the house, it appears that much of the exterior shell of the house is intact, because the asbestos siding, and window frames are extant. However, because the fire had spread into the wall cavities created by the wood frame construction, considerable burning happened between the inner and outer wall faces, leaving all wall cavities charred. The least fire-damaged part of the house is the southern-most room of the southern extension, which has only some slight damage to its roof framing members, and retains its window glazing.

Damage to the structure was also inflicted by the fire fighters. There are two large openings in the east exterior wall above the porch roof, and another similar opening in the west exterior wall, created in an effort to extinguish the fire in the wall cavity. Of the windows which remain, almost all glass was broken out by the force of the water, as were many of the wood mullions and rails.

As a result of this fire, the house has sustained extensive and irreparable damage to its structural system. Even though most of the exterior walls are still standing from ground level to eave height, their structural integrity is diminished by the fire damage within the wall cavity. Substantial loss of the internal horizontal framing assemblies (floor deck and roof assembly) effects the system's ability to brace the exterior walls and to withstand lateral forces.

FORT HANCOCK, MASTER WORKMAN'S RESIDENCE
(Fort Hancock, Building No. 112)
HABS No. NJ-1209-J (Page 3)

Considering the amount of water pumped into the house during the fire, and the amount of rain and snowfall which have entered the house since the roof collapsed, it is likely that most of the building's materials are saturated. Repair to the building is not possible because the widespread loss of structural soundness, and the destruction of finish materials.

History: Building 112 was constructed in 1879 during the final building campaign at the Proving Ground. Originally used as a residence for the Master Mechanics of the Proving Grounds, the Army renovated the building for use as a non-commissioned officers club in 1938. The building was returned to residential use under a short-term lease to the United States Coast Guard from 1975-1977. The building caught fire December 13, 1991 while it was undergoing renovations.

Sources: National Register of Historic Place's Inventory - Nomination Form
Fort Hancock and the Sandy Hook Proving Ground Historic District
Dr. Harry Butowsky, NPS
Dated: June 20, 1982

Draft Historic Structures Report, Architectural Data Section (Volume III)
Fort Hancock Structures, 1918-1978 Sandy Hook Unit, Gateway National
Recreation Area, New Jersey
Denver Service Center, National Park Service
U.S. Department of The Interior, August 25, 1988

Condition Assessment, Building 112, Fort Hancock, Sandy Hook Unit,
Gateway National Recreational Area
Prepared by Chandler McCoy, NPS, September 29, 1992

Prepared By: Patrick B. Guthrie , Historical Architect
North Atlantic Region
National Park Service
February/March 1994

