

Governors Island, Fort Columbus (Fort Jay)
Building #202
Governors Island
New York Harbor
New York City
New York County
New York

HABS No. NY-5715-1A

HABS
NY
31-GOVI,
1A-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HABS
NY
31-GOVI
1A-
(Page 1)

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GOVERNORS ISLAND, FORT COLUMBUS (FORT JAY)
BUILDING 202

HABS NO. NY-5715-1A

For background information, see documentation HABS No. NY-4-6 on Fort Columbus (Fort Jay)

Location: Fort Jay, east side of quadrangle, Governors Island, New York Harbor, New York.

Present Owner: United States Coast Guard

Present Occupants: 202A Lieutenant Commander and Mrs. J. Whiting
202B Vacant
202C Lieutenant Commander P. B. Fontneau
202D Commander P. M. Lebet

Present Use: Officers' Family Housing

Significance: Since its construction in the 1830s the building has served an essential function. It is one of a set of four nearly identical buildings within Fort Jay that have been in continuous use as quarters for troops and officers garrisoned on the Island. Despite alterations over nearly a century and a half, this two-story brick building with monumental two-story portico essentially retains its original architectural character.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Work on new barracks buildings to replace old ones within the fort was begun at least by 1834. The Engineering Department reported in that year that the masonry of the buildings on the south, west and north sides of the parade was nearly complete and the roofs ready to receive their covering. Work had also begun on the east barracks (American State Papers, vol. 5, p. 386). Work obviously proceeded slowly as an inspection report from September 1836 noted that the quarters were not yet ready for occupancy (Sheras to Cross, September 24, 1836). Two months later the Engineering Department reported the following: "The necessary plastering and painting will be finished this month, as well as the iron work and roofing of the barracks, at which time it is also expected the carpentry will be completed" (Ibid, vol. 6, p. 847). Triangular buildings were placed at the corners of each of the four barracks by 1839 and used at that time as privies and offices.
2. Architect: The building was probably designed by either the Engineering or Quartermaster Department on the Island.

GOVERNORS ISLAND, FORT COLUMBUS (FORT JAY)
BUILDING 202
HABS No. NY-5715-1A
(Page 2)

3. Original and subsequent owners: The United States Army was the original owner. Ownership was transferred to the United States Coast Guard in 1966.
4. Builder: Construction work was probably done by the Army under the direction of Captain J. L. Smith of the Engineering Department who was supervising construction work on the Island at the time the building was erected.
5. Original plans and construction: Plate 1, an 1839 elevation and floor plan of the barracks buildings within Fort Columbus, is the earliest drawing discovered (at that time the Building was probably still being used as officers' quarters). The drawing is in the Cartographic and Architectural Branch of the National Archives, Record Group 77, Fortifications File, Drawer 37, Sheet 23. The drawing also illustrates the small triangular buildings placed at each end of the larger buildings at some time during the 1830s.
6. Alterations and additions: Soon after construction, the plan of the barracks buildings was found to be unsatisfactory. A Board of Officers appointed to examine the conditions of the barracks and quarters on the Island reported in 1839 that the buildings did "not seem to be well adapted to the purposes for which they were designed." According to the Board, the rooms were too small and poorly ventilated, and inappropriately placed windows subjected the men to sudden changes of weather. Space allotted for colonnades on the front of the buildings could have been more wisely used to enlarge the rooms. The Board also felt that expanding the parade ground by placing the buildings next to the terreplein wall was unwise, since it allowed no space for exits at the rear of the buildings. Actually, removal of the barracks from their earlier position had not added sufficiently to the open space within the fort, and its use as a parade ground remained limited. To alleviate some of these problems, plans for making the interiors more functional were proposed by Colonel James Bankhead in 1844 (Plate 2). Iron balconies accessible by exterior stairs were to be placed on the second story of all four buildings, and windows at the ends and center were to be converted to doors opening onto the balconies. Interior stairways could then be removed and the rooms enlarged in the enlisted barracks and access provided to the inner rooms in the officers' quarters.

The proposed changes were apparently not made in the mid 1840s since another set of alterations to the buildings was proposed in 1855. Plate 3 illustrating proposed changes in the floor plan and exterior stairways, which differed little from the

earlier proposals, was submitted to the Chief of Engineers. The drawing does illustrate a further alteration not recommended in the earlier plans. The flat roof was to become a hipped roof. The suggestion to raise the roof had been made at least five years earlier since the interiors had been repeatedly damaged by leaks (Whiting to Jesup, January 28, 1850). The alterations were presumably made at the time although this could not be documented, and most likely the building was converted to enlisted barracks at the same time.

A report from 1863 does indicate that the building had been altered by that year and that it was being used as enlisted barracks instead of officers' quarters. Like the enlisted barracks on the north and south of the parade, the first floor of 202 contained two large and four small rooms and three large and two small rooms were on the second floor. The report further notes that each of the enlisted barracks had balconies on the second floor. In 1863 there were still eight small rooms in the basement. Within the next five years, the basement was altered to two large and four small rooms consistent with the plan of the other enlisted barracks (Surgeon General's Report, 1868, p. 11).

Excerpts from a detailed report made by the Surgeon General's Office in 1868 further document that the building had been altered.

Corridors extend the whole length of these buildings on the face looking to the parade; on all the buildings to either side of the sally ports a piazza is built the width of the corridors and on three of the buildings a piazza extends the whole part of the upper story but only half the width of the corridor. This piazza is supported by iron rafters extending from the building to the pillars of the corridor, a stairway leads from each end of the upper piazza to the lower one....In the mens quarters there are no halls - all stairways being built out doors.

The small triangular building constructed at the north corner of Building 202 was incorporated into the larger building and a second story added. The exact date of this alteration was not discovered, but was sometime before 1934. By 1934 when HABS drawings of the fort complex were completed, the two had been joined.

In 1920-21, the building was converted to officers' housing (HABS, 1934, p. 4). The floor plan was probably changed at the time of the conversion. The 1934 HABS drawings illustrate this plan which consisted of two quarters on each floor (Copies of

GOVERNORS ISLAND, FORT COLUMBUS (FORT JAY)
BUILDING 202
HABS No. NY-5715-1A
(Page 4)

the drawings are included with photographs following Fort Jay data. See sheets 2-4.). At some point, the terreplein was cut away from behind the parapet so that it sloped down to the basement floor level allowing windows to be cut through the old retaining wall which by 1934 formed the rear wall of the basement (HABS, 1934, p. 6). This may have been done during the 1920-21 conversion to make the basement quarters more livable. Later in 1934 work began to remodel the interior once again. Although the two quarters per floor scheme was retained, major changes were made in the floor plan which necessitated alterations to the building's fenestration pattern as well. Architectural drawings documenting these alterations are on file in the Facilities Engineering Office, Governors Island. (Copies are contained in the photographs following the Bibliography, HABS No. NY-5715-1A-6 through NY-5715-1A-8.) The porches on the east facade were enclosed during the 1930s work, and double brick garages were built in the bastions at the same time.

- B. Historical Context: Buildings to garrison the troops on Governors Island were an important element of the Fort Columbus complex from the beginning. The fort, initially constructed in the 1790s, contained three such buildings. The three survived the demolition of Fort Jay in 1805 and were joined shortly by two additional buildings. These are shown on Plates 4 and 5 a cross-section of the Island drawn in 1813. By 1827, the barracks buildings within the fort were in a bad state of decay with leaking roofs and deteriorated woodwork, masonry and plaster (Stanton to Jesup, March 18, 1827). Five years later, the Chief of Engineers reported that the entire removal of floors, ceilings and roofs was necessary and that the building shells were not worth saving. He recommended that the barracks be removed to a situation within the fort that would enlarge the parade ground (American State Papers, vol. 5, p. 42). Construction of new barracks within the fort began at least by 1834 and was completed several years later.

After construction of the four large buildings within the fort in the mid 1830s, Building #202 was occupied by officers. Its use as officers' quarters can be documented as late as 1840 when a drawing of the barracks buildings and officers quarters was made. By 1855 when alterations were made to the buildings, #202 had been converted to enlisted barracks. A report from 1875 noted that 16 to 18 single bunks were in each of the large rooms within the building. In that year, Companies A and C and the music boys of Company B occupied the three barracks buildings, but the report did not specify which company was quartered in Building #202. The report also noted that the triangular buildings at the corners of the larger buildings were occupied by company tailors and married soldiers on the upper stories

while ground floors housed the bakery, barber shop, sculleries and privies. Again the report was not detailed enough to determine the specific uses of the two buildings located next to Building #202.

Building #202 appears to have remained as enlisted barracks into the 20th century, before being converted to officers' housing. A map from 1908 lists all four buildings as barracks, presumably for enlisted men. The building was converted to officers' quarters in 1920-21 (HABS, 1934, p. 4). In March of 1934, the building was being occupied by four officers and their families (Ibid). In the same year, plans were made to remodel the interiors of all four buildings within the fort giving them a completely new floor plan. Work began on Building #202 in 1934 and was completed on the other three between 1936 and 1938 as part of the extensive work done on the Island by the Works Progress Administration. Building #202 remains as officers' quarters housing four families.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The building is one of four nearly identical Greek Revival styled structures originally used as quarters for troops and officers housed on the Island. The four buildings form a unified group with impressive porticoes featuring two-story masonry columns along the facades facing onto the quadrangle. Although altered several times by the incorporation of the small triangular building on the north side and by changes in the roof line, the building essentially retains its architectural character on the exterior. The interior however has been entirely altered from the original and exhibits details typical of the 1930s period.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is well maintained and is in good condition throughout.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building is rectangular with an acute angle on the northeastern corner made by the incorporation of a small triangular structure into the larger one. The two-story above raised basement building, which is 12 bays on the west or front side, and measures 182' 2" x 22' 3". The building is two stories above a raised basement. The basement is above grade on the east and south sides.
2. Foundations: The foundation is stone approximately 1' 9" thick on the north, south and west sides and 3' 1" on the east side.

GOVERNORS ISLAND, FORT COLUMBUS (FORT JAY)
BUILDING 202
HABS No. NY-5715-1A
(Page 6)

3. Walls: Basement walls are random red sandstone and granite ashlar on the north, west and south sides. The basement wall of the east or back side is parged and extends 1' 8" beyond the wall above. The fabric underneath is probably stone with a brick facing. First and second story walls are red brick laid in Flemish bond with queen closers at the corners. There is an area of 5-1 common bond on the east side at the north end and on the north wall where the building was enlarged by the incorporation of the small triangular structure. The walls show evidence of sandblasting.
4. Structural system: Exterior walls are masonry load bearing 1' 4" thick on the first floor and 1' on the second. On the interior, stud and plaster walls between units are 6". The remaining interior walls are 4" stud and plaster partitions. Floor joists are 3" x 10", 16" on center. Rafters are 2" x 8", 16" on center.
5. Porches, balconies: The major feature of the west portico is the 12 fluted masonry Doric columns set on coursed granite and red sandstone ashlar bases. The columns rise two stories to support a wooden entablature and hipped roof. Steps leading to the porch in the fourth and tenth bays have brick treads and risers. The wrought iron balustrades have diagonal balusters. Under the porch, the interstices between the piers are red brick laid in a basketwork pattern. The spaces between the columns in the other bays on the first and second stories are filled with wooden and metal panels 2" 8" high. The remainder of the four porches is enclosed by glass and screen. In the third bay from each end, straight-run stairways which are parallel to the west wall provide access to the second story porches. The square newel posts, thin square balusters, rail, treads, risers and stringers are all wood which has been painted.

On the east side, a straight-run stairway leads to a deck at the entrance to Quarters 202C at the north end of the building. The entire stairway and deck is wood painted red. On the south end of the east side is another straight-run stairway leading to a small open entrance porch for Quarters 202D. All members are wood painted gray.

6. Chimneys: Four interior brick chimneys are set to the east of the ridge.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: On the west side, each unit is entered through a wooden panelled and glass door with a three light transom. The four doors on the east side are wood are glass with three light transoms.

- b. Windows: Windows are typically six-over-six-light double hung sash with brick jack arches and stone or precast stone lug sills.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The hipped roofs of both the building and the porch are covered with asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The boxed eaves which appear to be wooden, contain the gutters and partially obscure a corbelled brick cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

The building is divided into four quarters each two stories above the basement. Since floor plans and interior finishes are similar, only one unit, Quarters 202B was examined.

1. Floor plan:

- a. Basement: The basement is entered by a metal spiral staircase located on the northeast corner of the dining room. The stairs lead to a storage room located at the south end of the quarters. To the north of this room is a hallway ending with a bathroom along the north wall is a storage room, laundry and maid's room.
- b. First floor: Entry on the north side of 202B is through a sun porch which faces west. The door opens directly into the living room on the west wall. To the right is the dining room and behind it the kitchen. To the north of the living room is a stair hall off which a closet and three bedrooms open.
- c. Second floor: The second floor has a master bedroom and two smaller bedrooms along the south wall. Each opens off the stair hall which runs east-west and is parallel to the stairs on the north wall. A bathroom is tucked into the acute angle at the eastern end of the building off the bedroom and a second bathroom terminates the hall on the west.

- 2. Stairways: The only stairway in Quarters 202B is a spiral staircase located in the northeast corner of the dining room. The round newel post, balustrade with squared balusters and treads are wrought iron.

3. Flooring: Flooring is typically varnished wood boards about 2 1/4" wide. The kitchen floor is linoleum, and the bathroom has hexagonal tile flooring. Floors in the basement laundry, bathroom and north maids' room are concrete; the remainder are wood painted gray. The porch floor is tongue and groove wood planks.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes: Walls and ceilings are plaster throughout with a wooden picture frame molding in the first floor rooms. Bathroom walls have ceramic tile wainscoting.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doors: Doors are typically four panels with transoms. Trim is generally plain.
 - b. Windows: Windows are typically deeply recessed with trim identical to that around the doors.
6. Decorative features and trim: The only fireplace is located on the south wall of the living room. Wooden pilasters flank the opening and support the wooden mantel. The facing is red brick, and the hearth is stone painted black.
7. Hardware: Door hardware is generally brass with unadorned plates and knobs.
8. Mechanical equipment: Heating is by steam with a boiler in the basement. Exposed metal radiators are in almost all rooms and appear to have decorated curvilinear designs which are obscured by many coats of paint. Cooling is achieved by window air conditioners.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces west onto the quadrangle within the fort. This area, which is divided into four sections by paved roadways, is planted with grass and trees and contains playground equipment and a picnic table. Directly across the quadrangle and to the north and south of it, are three similar structures. On the rear or east side of the building is an areaway enclosed by a chain link fence, sodded terreplein, the east curtain wall of the fort, the east sallyport and a small brick structure connected to the sallyport. The area surrounding this structure is enclosed by a chain link fence. To the south, is a small, triangular, stone and brick structure, one-story above basement (Building #204) connected to the larger building on the west by a red sandstone wall. Stone driveways to the north and south of the building lead to brick double garages.

2. Outbuildings: To the south of the building, is a small triangular, one-story, flat-roofed structure (Building #204) measuring 22' x 22'. The basement walls are random sandstone and granite ashlar, and first story walls are red brick laid in Flemish bond with queen closers at the corners. Door and window openings on the east side have been covered with plywood. Each has a stone lugsill and brick jack arch. A panelled wooden door, four-over-four-light sash and a single casement window pierce the walls on the north side. There is a brick chimney with corbelled cap on the south end. The smaller structure, which is currently used as a storehouse, is connected to the larger building on the west by a coursed red sandstone ashlar wall with rectangular opening. The wall is continuous with the basement wall of Building 204.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

The following drawings are located in the Cartographic and Architectural Branch of the National Archives in Record Group 77, Maps and Plans of the Office of the Chief of Engineers.

Plan of Fort Columbus, Governor's Island, New York, Divided Into Two Sections. The First Showing the Original Work. The Second Exhibiting the Repairs and Alterations Proposed to be Adopted in Completing the Authorized Repairs. Maj. R. E. DeRussey. October 17, 1832. Fortification File, Fort Columbus, Drawer 37, sheet 8.

Sheet No. 9, Details of Barracks, Fort Columbus, Governors Island. Capt. J. G. Barnard. December 1839. Fortification File, Fort Columbus, Drawer 37, sheet 23. Illustrates the facades and floor plans of the recently constructed buildings.

Proposed Alterations to the Barracks and Officers' Quarters within Fort Columbus, 1844. Filed with Colonel James Bankhead to Brigadier General R. Jones, November 5, 1844. Box 98, Colonel James Bankhead, Record Group 92, Office of the Quartermaster General, Consolidated Correspondence File, 1794-1915, Navy and Old Army Branch, National Archives. The proposed alterations were not done at the time.

Proposed Alteration in Soldiers Quarters in Fort Columbus, 1855. Fortification File, Fort Columbus Drawer 37, sheet 39. Alterations were probably completed shortly after the plans were submitted.

Officers Quarters in Fort Columbus with Proposed Alterations, 1855. Fortification File, Fort Columbus, Drawer 37, sheet 40.

Plans dated 1937-1938 which illustrate alterations to the basement and first and second floor plans are on file in the U.S.Coast Guard, Support Center, New York, Facilities Engineering Office, Governors Island.

B. Early Views

Possible View of Front Side, 1864. 165-C-1094A, Record Group 165, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Still Picture Branch, National Archives.

View of Front Side, March 18, 1931. U.S. Coast Guard, Support Center, New York, Special Services Office on Governors Island.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

The following sources are located in Record Group 92, Office of the Quartermaster General, Consolidated Correspondence File, 1794-1915, Navy and Old Army Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Major Henry Stanton to Brigadier General Thomas Jesup, March 18, 1827. Box 346, Governors Island. Describes condition of original barracks buildings within the fort.

Proceedings of a Board of Officers convened on the first day of April Eighteen hundred and thirty-nine. Box 191, Fort Columbus. Notes that the barracks buildings within the fort had recently been completed and discusses what the Board considered to be the poor design of the buildings.

Colonel James Bankhead to Brigadier General R. Jones, November 5, 1844. Box 98, Colonel James Bankhead. Discusses problems with the plans and proposes alterations to make the buildings more functional. A drawing showing the proposed changes is filed with the letter.

Inspection report made on public Buildings, Officers and Troop Quarters at Fort Columbus New York Harbor on the 31st day of October 1863 by 1st Lieut. James L. Casey, 5th Infantry, Acting Assistant Quartermaster U.S. Army. Box 191, Fort Columbus. Lists number of rooms per floor in the buildings.

Colonel H. Whiting to General Thomas Jesup, January 28, 1850. Box 346, Governors Island. Discusses problems resulting from the nearly flat roof and recommends raising the pitch of the roof.

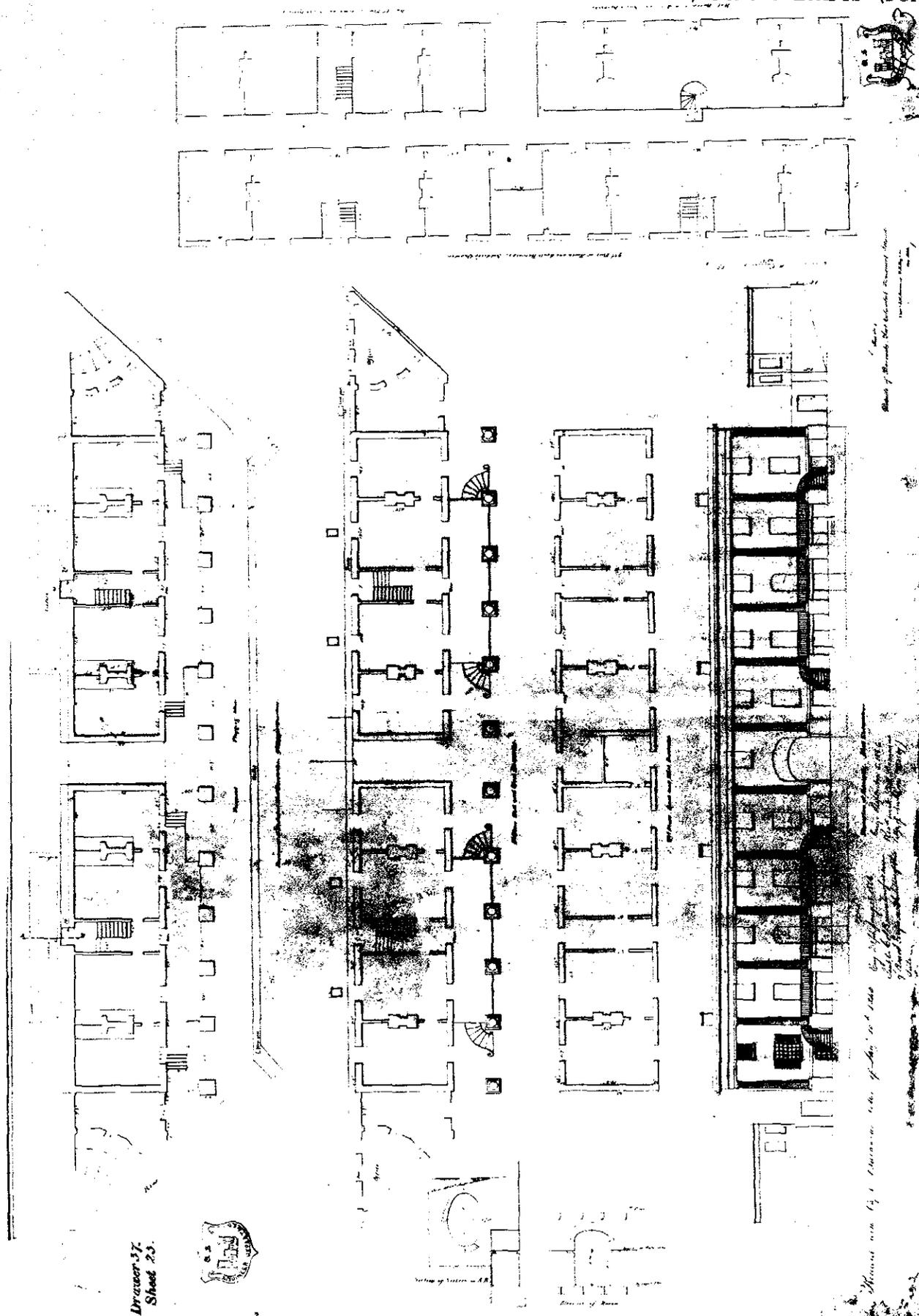
2. Secondary and published sources:

U.S. Surgeon General's Office. Governor's Island, Record of Medical History of the Post. Washington, D.G.: Medical Department, U.S. Army, May 14, 1868. Gives detailed description of the building and its use in 1868.

U.S. Surgeon General's Office. Circular No. 4, A Report on Barracks and Hospitals with Descriptions of Military Posts. Washington, D.G.: Government Printing Office, 1870. Description of the building's interior, exterior and use.

..... A Report on the Hygiene of the United States Army, with Descriptions of Military Posts. Washington, D.G.: Government Printing Office, 1875.

American State Papers: Documents Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States. Glass V, Military Affairs. vol. 5. Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1860. Briefly describes the progress of construction during the 1830s.



Drawer 37
Sheet 23

Plate I

Photocopy of Drawing of Barracks, Fort Jay, New York
National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 37, sheet 23
Details for Officer's and Soldier's Quarters
Drawn by Captain J.G. Barnard, December 1839

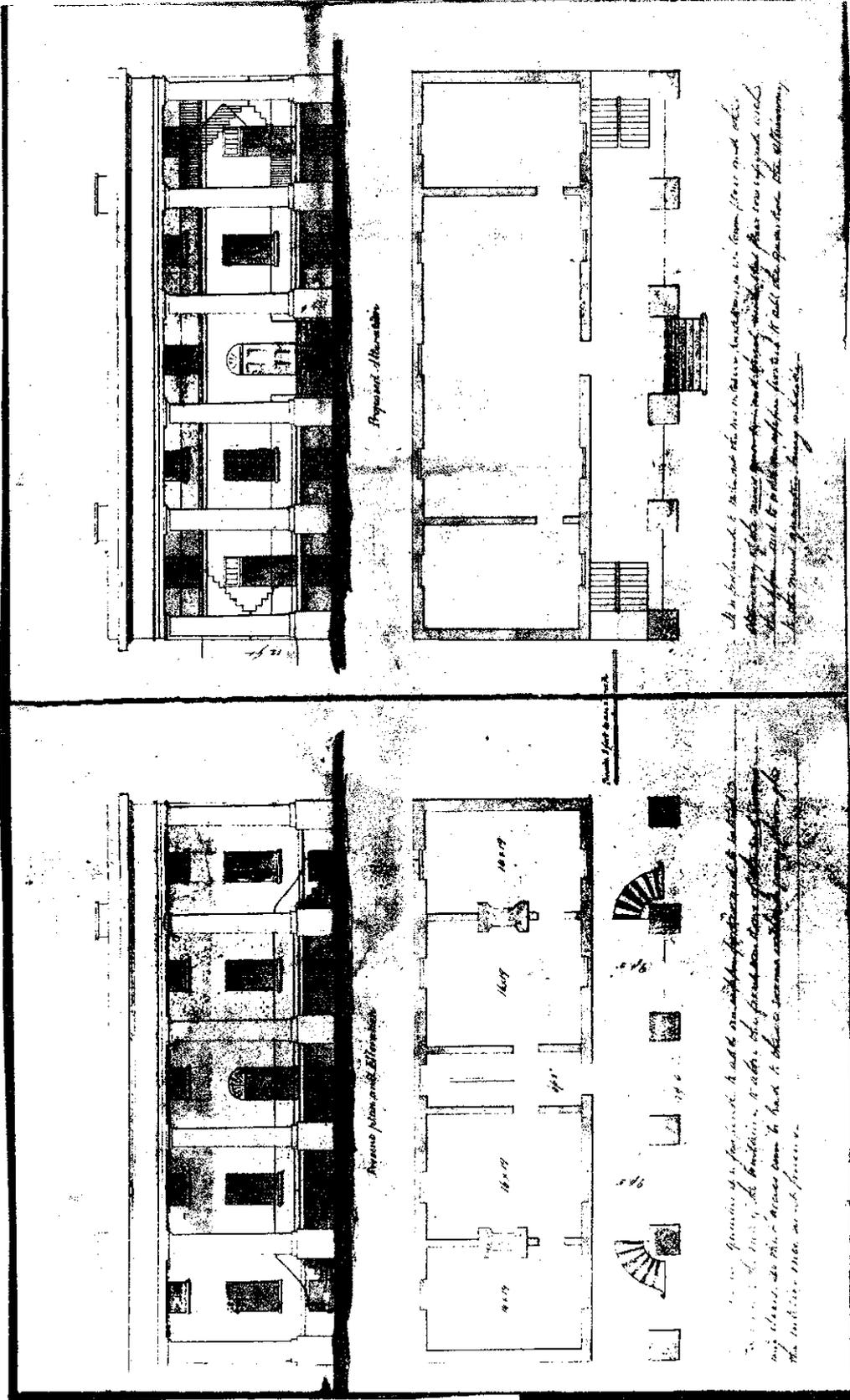


Plate 2
 Photocopy of Drawings of Officer's Quarters, Fort Columbus, New York
 National Archives, Record Group 92
 Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General
 Consolidated Correspondence File, 1794-1890
 Plans of Alterations of Barracks, Fort Columbus
 Drawn by Colonel James Bankhead, 1844

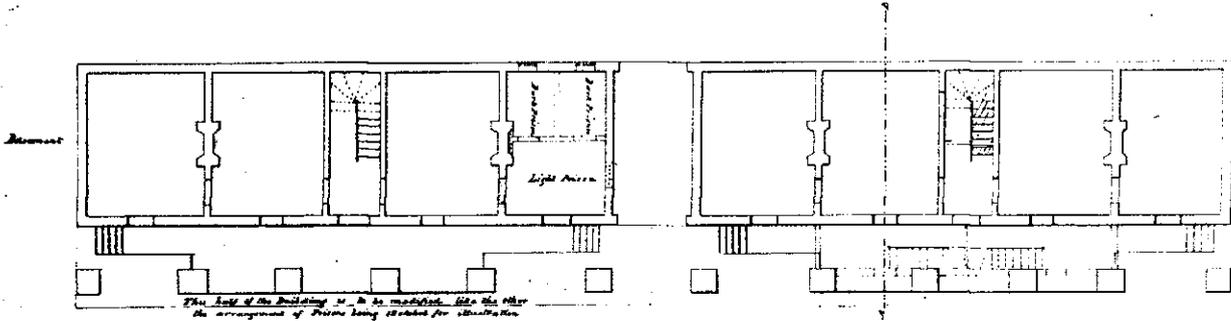
OFFICERS QUARTERS

in Fort Columbus, Governors Island, N.Y.
with proposed alterations

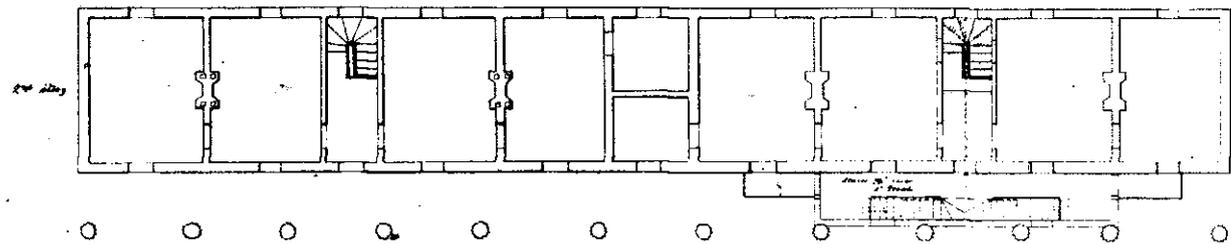
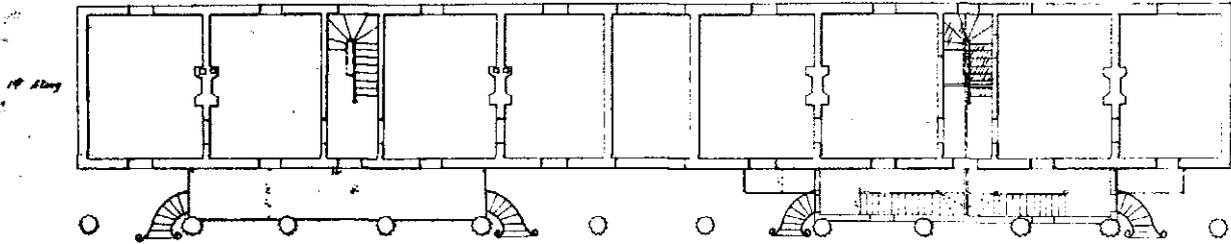
B



East Elevation



This part of the Building is to be modified, like the other
the arrangement of Rooms being retained for illustration



Notes on the Original
Presented to the Chief Engineer with my letter of the 2nd April 1855 (B. 104)
from New York.

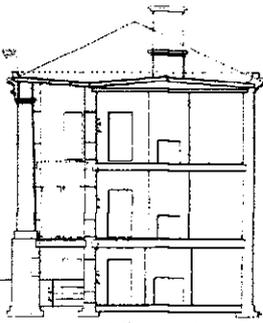
Arch. J. B. McPherson
Major of Engineers

Engineer Robert Smith
Resident April 2, 1855

The dimensions obtained from actual measurement,
and drawn by

J. B. McPherson
Chief of Staff

1855
March 1855



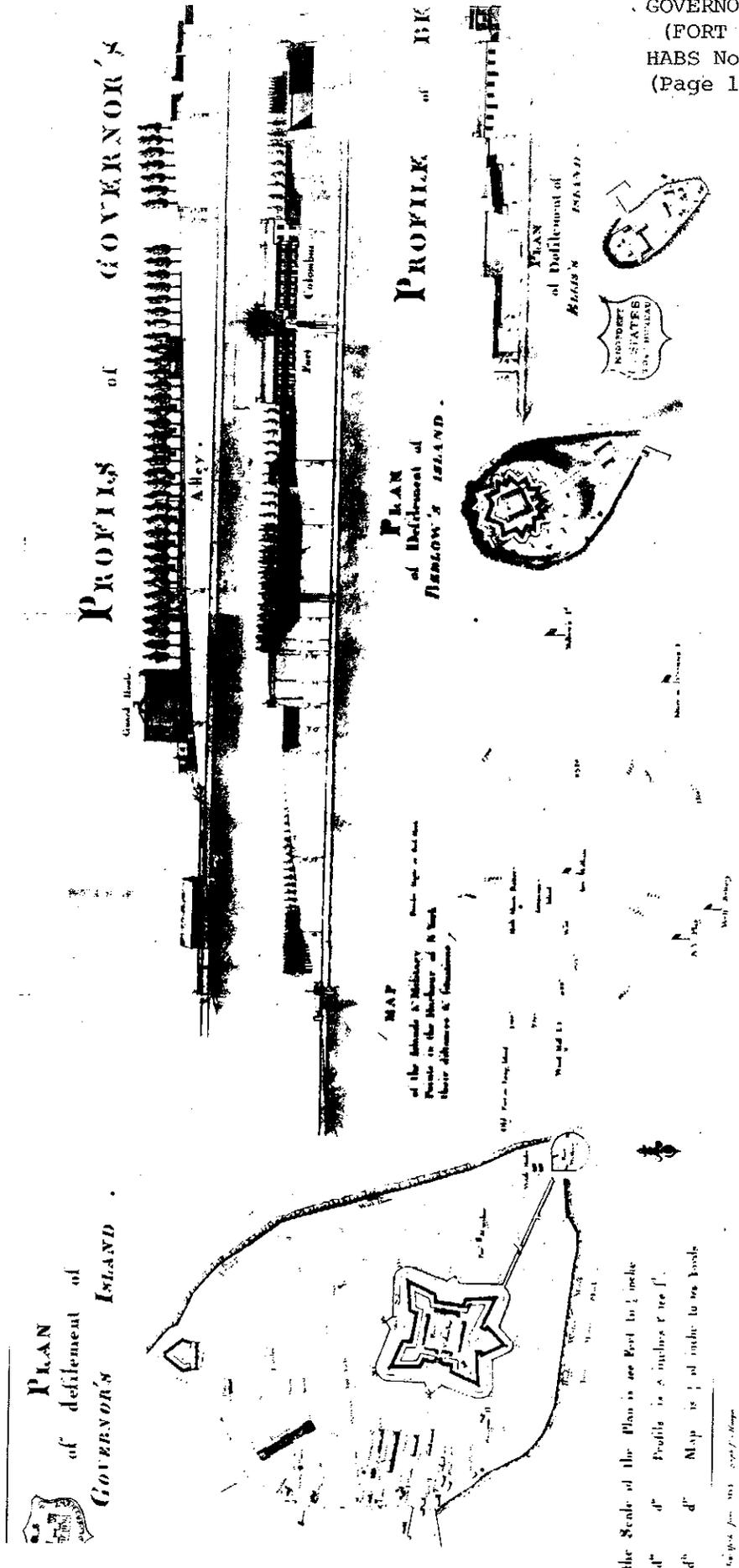
Section in A. B.

Scale of 1/4" to the Foot

J.B. The solid lines indicate the present arrangement
The dashed lines the proposed alterations

Plate 3

Photocopy of Drawings of Officer's Quarters, Fort Columbus, New York
National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 37, sheet 40
Plans and Alterations to Officer's Quarters
Drawn by J.B. McPherson, April 1855



PLAN
of Bedlow's Island
GOVERNOR'S ISLAND

the Scale of the Plan is one Part to 1000 feet
1" = 1000 feet
1" = 1000 feet
1" = 1000 feet

Plate 4
Photocopy of Map of Governors Island, New York
National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 36, sheet 20
Profiles of Governors Island, Bedlow's Island and Ellis Island
Drawn by Joseph L. Mangin, June 1813

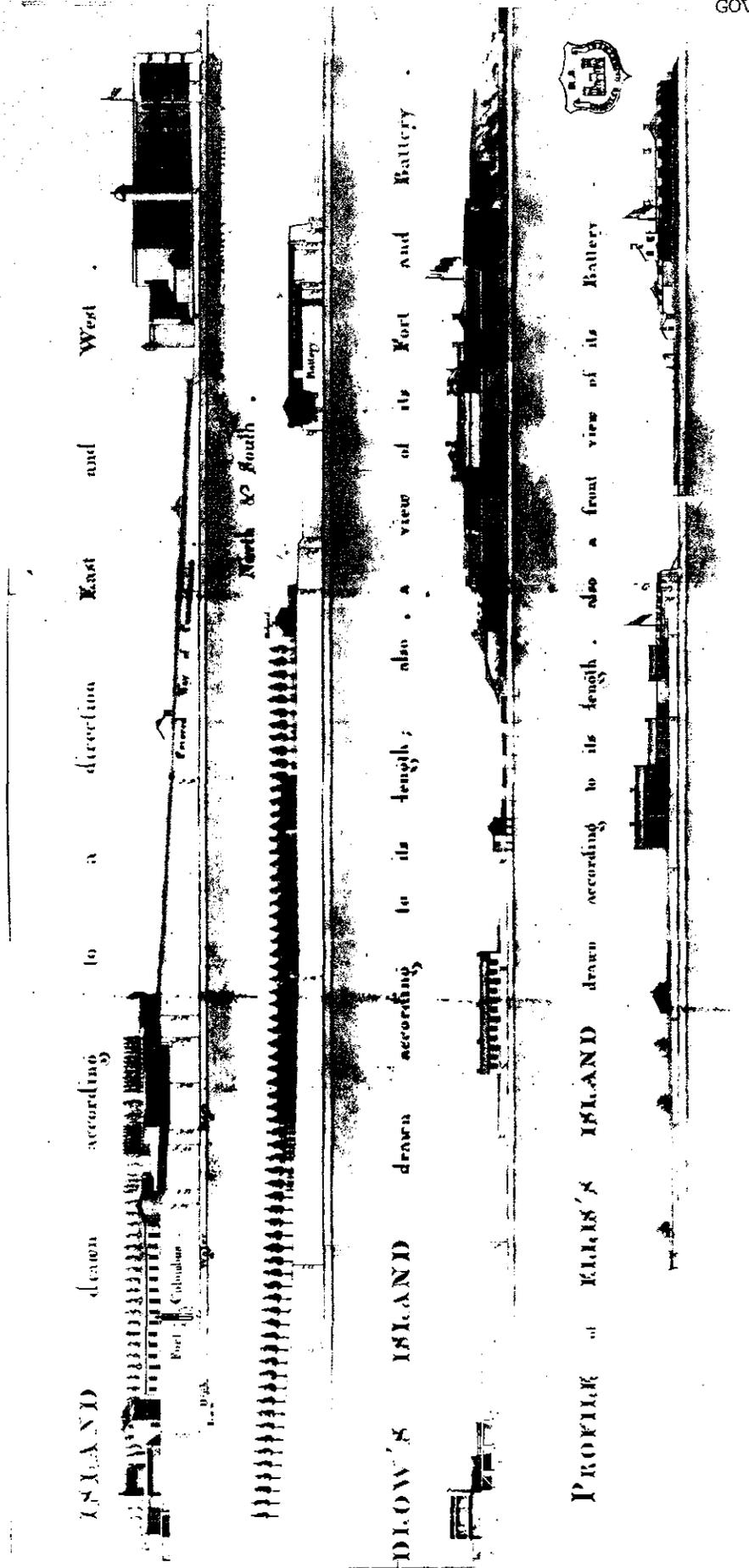


Plate 5

Photocopy of Map of Governors Island, New York
 National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
 Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 36, sheet 20
 Profiles of Governors Island, Bedlow's Island and Ellis Island
 Drawn by Joseph L. Mangin, June 1813

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) at the request of the United States Coast Guard, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, New York, who funded the project. The field work was accomplished during the summers of 1982 and 1983. The historic structures inventory, a National Historic Landmark District nomination and the documentation of five properties were completed in 1984. A three-volume report and inventory cards containing the results of the historic structures inventory have been transmitted to the Library of Congress as field records under HABS No. NY-5715. The National Historic Landmark District nomination was submitted and acted upon favorably by the National Park System Advisory Board in October of 1984.

Sally Kress Tompkins, Deputy Chief of HABS/HAER, was project manager. John Burns, AIA and S. Allen Chambers both of the HABS staff provided technical assistance and review; Jet Lowe, HAER staff photographer, completed the large format photography; Blanche Higgins, historian, and David Broderson of Cornell University completed the historic structures inventory during the summer of 1982; Barbara Hightower, historian, developed the HABS documentation during the summer of 1983; Karin Madison of the HABS/HAER staff assisted in the production of the report and provided photographic control. Paige George of the University of Virginia did the Governors Island map and title sheet. Jay Silberman, Environmental Specialist, District Planning Office, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, served as manager and coordinator of the project for the U.S. Coast Guard.