

U.S. COAST GUARD (USCG) FORT CROCKETT HOUSING,
SENIOR OFFICER HOUSING UNIT
Fort Crockett Historic District
4301-4305, 4309-4313, 4317-4321, and 4401-4405 Sarna Court
Galveston
Galveston County
Texas

HABS TX-3474
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SOUTHWEST SYSTEM SUPPORT OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
PO Box 728
Santa Fe, New Mexico

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SENIOR OFFICER HOUSING UNIT

HABS No. TX-3474

Location: 4301-4305, 4309-4313, 4317-4321, 4401-4405 Sarna Court
Fort Crockett
Galveston, Galveston County, Texas

USGS Galveston Quadrangle (7.5')

Significance: This Senior Officer Housing Unit, one of four identical buildings, is part of the Fort Crockett Housing Units that are contributing elements to the Fort Crockett Historic District. The district is significant for its role as a coastal defense installation and training center of the Texas and Gulf coasts from 1897 to World War II. This unit, built in 1910, represents structures remaining from the Fort's 1909 building program. These buildings possess a sense of unity by virtue of their scale, form, massing, materials, and relationship to each other. Along with the remaining structures and batteries, these units retain a sense of the overall importance of Fort Crockett and its significance in the history of Galveston and the Texas Coast.

Description: The housing complex consists of fourteen buildings: a Base Commanding Officer's Unit, four Senior Officer Housing Units, and four Junior Officer Units, and five Enlisted Units. As originally constructed, the buildings met the functional requirements of the army, the climatic setting, and are in character with many of the other facilities at Fort Crockett. This unit is identical to three adjacent units built in 1910 at 4301-4305, 4309-4313 and 4401-4405 Sarna Court. A 1949 map of the base places these units at the eastern-most end of the facility (Post Office, 1949).

This housing unit is a rectangular shaped two-story duplex with front and rear projections, reinforced concrete exterior wall construction, wood floor and roof framing. The building exhibits a Mediterranean influence characterized by its low pitched roof, roof line parapet, and windows that are smaller on the second floor than windows on the first floor. The original appearance of the unit was probably similar to the original Commanding Officer's Unit. The unit's basic footprint and massing is similar to the original construction, however significant alterations were made to the building prior to 1949. Alterations include replacement of the clay tile roofing with composition shingles, replacement of the original wood windows with aluminum windows, enclosure of the open crawl space at ground level, addition of gutters and downspouts, the removal of

two tall masonry chimneys on the north side of the unit to below the level of the roof deck. The original unit had a two-story wood framed porch extending along the full south facade and approximately two-thirds of the east and west facades and it appears the second level of the porch was screened for use as a sleeping porch. A 1949 photograph of Unit 4317-4321 shows the wood porches removed, with the addition of a two story reinforced concrete entry/porch, with a roof line parapet extending above the hipped clay tile roof.

Historical Context: Late 19th century to 1914: Fort Crockett was established in 1897, by authorization of the United States Government for a coastal artillery installation. The first troops were stationed at the fort in 1899. In 1900 most of the original fortifications were badly damaged by a storm and reconstruction of the fort was undertaken by the United States Army Engineers. The Commanding Officer's Unit and the Senior Officer's Units were built in 1910 as part of the reconstruction of Fort Crockett.

A 1911 pamphlet mentions the housing units and some of their amenities

"With very few exceptions the buildings are of reinforced concrete construction and absolutely fireproof...The buildings have all been constructed to meet the requirements of the climate. Wide galleries have been provided and to a large extent the mission style of architecture has been carried out. The buildings all overlook the Gulf of Mexico...and there is not to be found in any part of the country a more pleasant spot for the location of Uncle Sam's fighters."¹

No garrison was assigned to Fort Crockett until 1911, when it became the mobilization center for 4,000 troops during the Mexican border troubles. In 1912, the 5th Infantry Brigade arrived and remained until 1914, when they were ordered to Vera Cruz, Mexico, returning in November 1914.

World War I to 1939. Fort Crockett served as an assembly point for troops being sent overseas in World War I to France and as training grounds for heavy artillery troops for the expeditionary forces, while the Coast Artillery forces and their gun emplacements were ready for immediate action if necessary. After the war, the Third Attack Group from Kelly Field was stationed at the fort in 1926 and an airstrip was built in 1927. Between 1927 and 1935 the fort was used to train coast artillery,

and shortly thereafter the fort was reopened for use as a Fourth Army recreation center. In 1954, Fort Crockett was declared surplus and transferred to the General Services Administration for disposal. Many of the buildings have since been demolished for parking lots, hotels, retail centers, condominiums and apartments. The remaining facilities are now used by Galveston College, Texas A & M University at Galveston, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the U.S. Coast Guard. It appears that the U.S. Coast Guard acquired the housing units from the Department of the Army on two separate occasions. In 1958, the U.S. Coast Guard acquired ten units on Sarna Court and all of the units on 53rd Street, and in 1966 acquired seven additional units of family housing which most likely consisted of the remaining three duplexes and the Commanding Officer's unit on Sarna Court. (Richter 1958, Department of the Army 1966).

Sources:

Magee, Gregory H. Correspondence from Commander, USCG, to Mr. James W. Steel, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission. n.d., response requested by February 1, 1990.

Richter, H. L. Comptroller, U.S. Army Engineer District, Galveston. Memorandum regarding transfer and date of construction of Fort Crockett housing units, October 13, 1958.

Ray Bailey Architects, Inc. and Walter P. Moore and Associates, Inc. Structure Investigation Report: Fort Crockett Senior Officers Housing (USCG) 4301-4409 Sarna Court, Galveston Texas. Report includes the background history of Fort Crockett. Prepared for the USCG Civil Engineering Unit, Miami, Florida, May 11, 1993.

Department of the Army. Real Estate Disposal Report No. 222, January 31, 1966. Report notes four buildings of 1911 construction containing seven units of family housing.

Project information: This project is a mitigative recording required by a Memorandum of Agreement executed by the U.S. Coast Guard, the Texas State Historic Preservation Officer, the General Services Administration, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. An historic preservation covenant conveys with the property regarding the preservation, maintenance, and development of the properties.

Woodward-Clyde Federal Services completed mitigation documentation for this project between July and September 1997. Nicole Cawlfild prepared the photographic documentation and Susan Cianci Salvatore compiled the Architectural Data Form from information supplied by the U.S. Coast Guard.

