

Fort Myer: Commissary  
Sergeant's Quarters  
(Building No. 42)  
North side Washington Avenue  
between Johnson Lane and Custer Road  
Fort Myer/Arlington  
Arlington County  
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1253-A

HABS  
VA,  
7-ARL,  
3-A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS  
VA,  
7-ARL,  
03-A-

FORT MYER: COMMISSARY  
SERGEANT'S QUARTERS  
(Building No. 42)

HABS No. VA-1253-A

Location: North side Washington Avenue between  
Johnson Lane and Custer Road, Fort Myer,  
Arlington County, Virginia  
USGS Washington West-DC-MD-VA  
Quadrangle  
U.T.M. Coordinates: 18.319590.4305980

Present Owner: United States Army

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Commissary Sergeant's Quarters at Fort Myer (Building No. 42) was constructed in 1877 to a standard plan issued by the Quartermaster General's Office in 1876, possibly designed by the Quartermaster General himself, Montgomery C. Meigs. The unusual construction method, in which 3-1/2" x 12" horizontal planks are secured by corner notching and wooden dowels with the planks extended at the edges, is probably a response to a ban on construction of "permanent" buildings at military posts in the aftermath of the Civil War. The simple, one-story, two-room cabin design represents an early and imaginative attempt to provide acceptable housing for noncommissioned officer families during this period. It was used at a few other posts as well. Side and rear additions made in the late 19th and early 20th century have partially obscured but have not destroyed the original design, and the house is in fair condition. The Commissary Sergeant's Quarters is included in the Fort Myer Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1877. A lithographed copy of a standardized plan issued by the Quartermaster General's Office in 1876 and approved for construction as Commissary Sergeant's Quarters at Fort Whipple (later renamed Fort Myer), Virginia, by the Secretary of War on May 8, 1877, survives in the National Archives Architectural and Cartographic Branch (Record Group 77, Miscellaneous Fortifications File, #15).

2. Architect: No architect is identified on the plan. However, the copy approved for use at Fort Myer bears instructions as to construction details that appear to have been taken directly from Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs' correspondence and notes (including sketches) concerning identical construction techniques used in 1875 for another, larger building designed as officers' quarters at Fort Myer. This suggests that the Quartermaster General may have designed the Commissary Sergeant's house and almost certainly devised the construction method.

Montgomery Cunningham Meigs (1816-1892) served as Quartermaster General of the United States Army from 1861 to 1882. He attended briefly the University of Pennsylvania before entering the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1832. He was commissioned in 1836 as a second lieutenant in the 1st Artillery. Later that year he received a brevet commission as second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers, then returned briefly to the 1st Artillery before transferring permanently to the Corps of Engineers in 1837.

Meigs' first assignment in the Corps of Engineers was to assist 1st Lt. Robert E. Lee in a survey of the Mississippi River aimed at finding ways to improve navigation on the river. Later he supervised the construction of Fort Wayne on the Detroit River (1837-1849). For about a year (1849-50) he served as assistant to General Joseph G. Totten, chief engineer in Washington, D.C., then moved on to Rouses Point, New York, to build Fort Montgomery. At Totten's suggestion, he was selected in November of 1852 to undertake a survey of possible sources of a public water supply for the city of Washington, which at that time was dependent upon springs and wells. After completing the survey, Meigs prepared a persuasive recommendation for the construction of an aqueduct from

Great Falls, Virginia, to Washington. Congress accepted Meigs' proposal (which had the endorsement of the Secretary of War) and in late March 1853 Meigs, newly promoted to captain's rank, became superintendent of the construction of the Washington Aqueduct. On the same day he was placed in charge of the extension of the United States Capitol and the wings of the Post Office. The architect for the Capitol project, Thomas U. Walter, had been criticized for financial irregularities and Meigs, as both disbursing agent and supervising engineer, was given full power to make any changes he deemed necessary in Walter's work. A favorite of President Pierce and Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, Meigs also proved skillful at lobbying Congress for appropriations, making many powerful friends. Meigs' engineering abilities supplied the critical improvements in heating, ventilation, and acoustics lacking in Walter's original design for the Capitol dome and extensions, and his administrative talents kept the project on track. Under the Buchanan presidency, however, friction developed not only between Meigs and Walter, but also between Meigs and the new Secretary of War, John B. Floyd. In late 1859, with the Capitol and Post Office projects nearing completion and funds for the aqueduct cut off, Meigs was dismissed from his Washington assignments and transferred to the Dry Tortugas to oversee the construction of Fort Jefferson. In 1861, however, after Floyd's resignation, Meigs was recalled to Washington to resume supervision of the aqueduct. Shortly thereafter he was named Quartermaster General, a post in which he served with distinction throughout the Civil War. During the war, Meigs developed an intense concern for the construction of economical, easily built, substantial, fireproof buildings to house men and supplies. The little plank house at Fort Myer meets at least the first three of these concerns.

Meigs was replaced as Quartermaster General in 1882 but his interest in architecture and the construction of fireproof buildings remained unabated. The projects for which he was responsible in Washington include not only the Capitol wings and cast-iron dome, the Post Office, the aqueduct and the impressive, masonry-arched Cabin John Bridge, but also the National Museum (1877-81, with revisions by Cluss and Schultze) and the Pension Building.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners: U.S. Army.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not known.

5. Original plans and construction: The Commissary Sergeant's Quarters at Fort Myer was built to a standard plan issued by the Quartermaster General's Office in 1876 and approved for use at Fort Myer in 1877. The small, one-story cabin consisted of just two rooms, each approximately 14' square, arranged front to back, forming a rectangle 15'3" x 29'8". A front porch, 6' deep, was sheltered by the overhanging eaves of the transverse gable roof. The original drawings call for the house to be set on piers, but the present foundation is of brick, and it is not known what materials or type of construction were actually used. The primary feature of the design arises from the construction technique: horizontal 3-1/2" x 12" dressed planks, laid on edge and projecting at the ends, form both the exterior walls and the single partition. The walls are secured by notching at the corners and Z joints pegged with short wooden dowels where the ends of the planks meet. A central chimney between the two rooms served a fireplace in each room. Physical evidence suggests that the original finish was a deep brown paint. The cost was estimated at \$1,365. Information is derived from the 1877 drawing noted above, with cost estimates written on the back.

6. Alterations and additions: A two-room frame addition on brick foundation was made to the east side in 1890 (drawing labeled "Proposed Addition to Commissary Sergeant's Quarters at Fort Myer, dated on reverse Sep. 1., 1890; in the correspondence files of the Office of the Quartermaster General; National Archives, Record Group 92, E. 225). The addition cost \$515.70. The foundation for the original 1877 portion may have been changed from stone or cedar pier construction to brick at this time also, although no documentary or physical evidence has been located to prove this.

A rear addition at the northwest corner was apparently made ca. 1893. It first appears on a map dated 1894 (National Archives Architectural and Cartographic Branch, Record Group 92, Blueprint File, Fort Myer, VA, No. 14, "Fort Myer, Va."). The map shows water and sewer connections to the property, indicating that the new addition contained kitchen and bath facilities. It seems likely that the heating system was converted from the central chimney and fireplace system to stoves either at this time or during the 1890 addition.

A third and final addition at the northeast corner is believed to have been completed ca. 1926-7, based on

physical evidence and the fact that similar updating of kitchen and bath facilities was done at other properties at this time. This small addition completes the rectangular outline of the building. The roof was apparently changed at this point to cover the entire building block beneath a full rear-facing gable.

B. Historical Context:

Fort Whipple (renamed Fort Myer in 1881), Virginia, was established in 1863 as a signal corps training post. It occupied the northeast portion of the Arlington Estate, home of the Lee family, which was taken over by the Army at the outbreak of the Civil War. Located approximately a mile west of Georgetown, it was one of a cordon of forts erected for the defense of Washington. Following the Civil War, Army posts generally were allowed to lapse into a state of neglect. Surpluses of many goods and supplies had been accumulated during the war, but the permanent structures needed to house troops and their families at the new posts in the west, as well as older ones in the east, were, of course, not among these surpluses. The postwar lack of interest in the regular volunteer army, coupled with the troubled economy of the 1870s, offered little encouragement to Congress to spend on military projects. The annual reports of the Quartermaster General make repeated urgent requests for housing funds, but apparently to no avail. Fiscal year 1877, in fact, began with no military appropriation on hand at all, and recent legislation prevented the use of retained surpluses from the previous year.

It seems likely that the little plank house at Fort Myer was a response to the economic strictures of the period by a creative quartermaster's office. The Commissary Sergeant's house was the first, and for many years, the only example of housing specifically built for noncommissioned officers at Fort Myer. It was eventually joined by four other buildings for noncoms' families on the north side of Washington Avenue, the early main street of the fort. The cost of the building was estimated at \$1,365, and care was taken to ensure that the frame construction and pier foundations fit within the allowed guidelines for temporary housing. (Permanent housing, the construction of which was prohibited except when specifically authorized by Congress, was defined by the presence of brick walls or foundations.)

FT. MYER: COMMISSARY  
SERGEANT'S QUARTERS  
(Building No. 42)  
HABS No. VA-1253-A (page 6)

The residence assigned in 1885 to the First Sergeant of the Signal Corps, the Commissary Sergeant's first neighbor, was a farm-type two-story frame structure still extant on the lot immediately to the west of the plank house. It appears to have been moved to this site between the Commissary Sergeant's house and the Quartermaster Depot Storage House (later demolished for the construction of other NCO housing), and it illustrates even more poignantly the plight of married NCOs and their families. In 1882 a request for housing for the First and his large family was submitted, along with a proposed plan and cost estimate of \$1800 for a two-story house, to the Quartermaster General's Office (NAR Record Group 92, E. 84, Box 711).

A query came back: "Why is so large and expensive a structure required for the Sergeant?"

The commanding officer at Fort Whipple, Captain R.A. Strong, replied:

"The quarters are needed for the 1st Sergeant of the Signal Corps, who has a family of six children, all of whom have been born at this post. He has been in service for 20 years and for 10 years past has filled the important position of 1st Sergeant in the Signal Corps. The man's services are exceedingly valuable and could not be dispensed with without detriment to the service. There are no quarters at the post suitable for him. Application was made in December 1880 for the erection of the building, but it could not be done for want of funds. The Quartermaster /Meigs/ directed me to renew the application at some future time and said that he would approve the matter."

However, the building was not approved, possibly because Quartermaster General Meigs was at that point on the verge of a reluctant retirement. At any rate, shortly afterward, Captain Strong sought permission to move three old buildings on the post at a cost of \$100. Permission was granted. Whether the First Sergeant's quarters was among those buildings is not certain, since the present building first appears on a map of the fort made in 1894. There is no doubt, however, that another old building was moved to the lot adjacent to the First Sergeant's house around 1903 for use as NCO housing. (This building apparently predated the establishment of Fort Whipple and had been used

FT. MYER: COMMISSARY  
SERGEANT'S QUARTERS  
(Building No. 42)  
HABS No. VA-1253-A (page 7)

variously as officers' and NCO housing before the move.)

The design for the Commissary Sergeant's quarters is based on an early standardized plan developed by the Quartermaster General's Office in response to widespread public outcry at the poor living conditions of the military. Grashof's Study of Army Family House notes that it was used at other forts as well, notably, St. Augustine, Florida (possibly 1876) and Benicia Barracks, California (1878). (Note, however, that Grashof dates the Saint Augustine building to 1878; the construction may indeed have been delayed until 1878, but the fact that the St. Augustine plan was relettered for use at Fort Myer suggests an earlier construction date for the St. Augustine building.)

The construction technique had been used even earlier at Fort Myer in an Officers Quarters built in the fall of 1875 (National Archives, Record Group 92, E. 225, Box 710). The Quartermaster General himself had issued instructions for dealing with the peculiarities of the horizontal-plank construction, warning that:

"The side walls and partitions being built of plank and laid horizontally on edge, there will be considerable shrinkage in dry and swelling in wet weather across the grain."

This should present no problem, he thought, so long as all the vertical and horizontal pieces were nailed to the walls and partitions only at the bottom "strakes" (the bottom horizontal members) so as not to hinder movement of the planks up and down within the grooves formed by the window and door casings. (He figured the movement at 1/2" to each foot of height.) Nonetheless, the building had hardly been finished before there were complaints that crevices in the plank walls opened as much as 1/4", allowing an uncomfortable amount of wind and rain to enter the rooms. Approval was given for plastering the building, But the Quartermaster General's reply to the complaints indicates how the building was intended to be finished:

"I/f properly built /it/ ought not to show the extent of crevices complained of. It is impossible for a building of this character not to show crevices or openings between the timbers of which it is built while undergoing the shrinkage which all timber is subject to. It, therefore, would be impolitic to attach to

this changeable material an unchangeable /one?/  
such as mortar, which must inevitably crack and  
fall, necessitating a removal of it within a  
short time. Would it not be better, as was  
originally designed, to cover the cracks with  
muslin and paper within and after the walls  
have completed the shrinkage to then /sic/  
plaster the inside and cement the outside  
whenever necessary?"

A group of Signal Corps photographs dated 1876 show the same construction technique used on a much grander scale for officer quarters at Fort Myer (including even the Commanding Officer's quarters). Farther afield, they were also employed at Fort Barrancas, Florida, for quarters for the ordnance sergeant (built to a different plan of 1873) and for officers quarters at Newport, Kentucky, and in 1917 at Fort Lewis, Washington, for a set of quarters with a garage and also the officers' club at Fort Lewis (Grashof, NCO-3). It seems likely that the technique was most successful in very temperate climates. The memoranda on the plan approved for Benicia Barracks (the same design as the Fort Myer Commissary Sergeant's Quarters) allow the use of frame, plaster and siding if desired.

The design used at for the Commissary Sergeant's house at Fort Myer, while certainly very modest in size and materials, ventures well beyond the merely utilitarian, suggesting that its designer had considerable skill as an architect. The shaped ends of the projecting planks and rafters produce a jaunty, somewhat "picturesque" effect, not out of keeping with the Italianate and cottage styles ubiquitous in civilian houses of the period.

By the 1890s, conditions had eased somewhat for the military, and a new wave of permanent building was beginning. The two brick double houses at the end of Fort Myer's NCO Washington Avenue group show the effect not only on the size and durability of housing in the later period, but on the designs themselves, which take on a more consistent architectural tone, largely brick in construction materials and Colonial Revival in style.

The Commissary Sergeant's Quarters (now Building No. 42) and its neighbors on Washington Avenue were included in the Fort Myer Historic District listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

FT. MYER: COMMISSARY  
SERGEANT'S QUARTERS  
(Building No. 42)  
HABS No. VA-1253-A (page 9)

Prepared by: Shirley Maxwell  
Title: Historian  
Affiliation: Massey Maxwell  
Associates  
Date: November 1988

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a rare surviving example of an unusual type of construction. It is a plank house with 3-1/2" x 12" dressed timbers with interlocking corners and projecting ends. Probably designed by Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs, who was noted for his architectural and engineering work, the plan was used at several widely separated Army posts.
2. Condition of fabric: The house is in fair to good condition, although there is evidence of old decay in the lower planks of the structure.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The house is a rectangle 29'8" wide by 45'11" deep. There is a 3-bay front and the building has one story. There is a crawl space to grade below the first floor and an unlighted attic within the gable roof.

The building has four basic parts: On the front left (southwest) corner is the two-room original plank-construction house, built 1877. See original lithographed and annotated drawing photocopied with this report. The original plank-construction section is 15'3" x 29'3". The first addition (1890) was two rooms on the right (southeast) front side. The second addition (ca. 1893) was kitchen, bath and utility spaces at the rear (northwest) of the 1877 and 1890 portions. The last addition, made in the early 20th century at the rear northeast corner, possibly in 1926-7, completed the full rectangle and resulted in a rebuilt rear gable roof.

2. Foundations: The 1877 and 1890 front sections have a common-bond brick foundation with vent holes. The section under the 1877 portion is believed to have been added, possibly at the time of the 1890 addition. The proposed plans for the 1890 addition show a brick foundation under the addition. The original 1877 plans indicate, and Army regulations required, pier foundations. It is not known what type of foundation was originally used. The rear

FT. MYER: COMMISSARY  
SERGEANT'S QUARTERS  
(Building No. 42)  
HABS No. VA-1253-A (page 11)

additions have a concrete foundation that may be original.

3. Walls: The 1877 section is plank construction with dressed timbers 3-1/2" x 12" interlocking at the corners and with 10" projecting ends. Individual planks are laid on edge, 12" high, in horizontal rows. The exterior finish is that of a flush, matched-board wall except where the intersecting planks extend at the corners and at the partition in the middle. The original finish was a rich, dark brown paint. This was followed by a dark gray paint and then by several coats of light grays, several layers of tan or cream, and several layers of white, which is the current finish for the entire exterior. The gable continues the same construction, with the ceiling rafters also projecting with molded ends. On the front, wall planks extend outward to frame the porch roof, ending in a generous scroll. Projecting scrolled end-wall planks frame the eaves at the ends; rising in the gable are three triangular chamfered brackets with a pendant on the ridge bracket. The original design calls for the three brackets to be connected by timbers. It is not known whether this was ever done.

The side and rear additions are frame, with stud construction and German siding 5" to the weather. There are plain 4" boards at the corners.

4. Structural systems, framing: The structural system of the original 1877 portion is load-bearing plank construction, using 3-1/2" x 12" dressed lumber with interlocking corner joints and projecting ends. The planks are further tied together with 3/4" dowels horizontally between planks. The cross partition in the center is also 3-1/2" x 12" load-bearing planks. The planks are laid on edge horizontally, 12" to the weather. The planks are joined end to end in a Z joint, partially visible in the gable photograph of the west wall. The ends project 10" and are finished with 45-degree angle cuts 3" long.

The additions have light frame stud walls. All sections of the house have wood joists and rafters.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: There is a front porch to the original 1877 section. It was

originally an open porch without railings but sheltered by the overhanging roof extension. This has been rebuilt in the same location with tongue-and-groove board floor and simple 2" x 4" railing and, inside and separately, a screened enclosure. There is one screen door and two steps to the ground. The original roof extension supported on extended wall planks continues to provide the roof structure. On the 1893 rear addition at the northwest corner there is a small screened service or entrance porch with two steps. This was originally larger but has been partially partitioned in. At the northeast corner there is an entrance with two steps, no stoop.

6. Chimneys: On the north rear there is a large, high, modern brick chimney on the exterior of the wall with a concrete foundation. In the original 1877 section there was a chimney in the center which has been removed above the roof line. This was part of the original construction. The chimney survives on the first floor.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front door of the original 1877 section is a modern sash door with four lights over three horizontal panels. It is located at the left front. There is plain board trim and a wood sill. The door is a replacement; the original drawings call for a door with four vertical panels. There are two doors on the rear addition: The left rear door (northeast corner) is a simple, modern, five-horizontal-panel door. On the rear right inside the screened service porch is a similar modern door with five horizontal panels and with a vent panel inserted. Both doors have plain board trim and wood sills. All hardware is simple, modern hardware of no special interest.

b. Windows and shutters: The original 1877 section has 6/6 light double-hung wood sash that are modern replacements. There is one on the front facade and two on the west or left facade. Two former windows have been covered over by the 1890 side addition. There is simple board trim and plain wood sills. It is impossible to tell

from the drawing or estimate of materials what type of windows these were or just what type was installed. There are no shutters now, and no shutters are shown on the construction drawings; however, one shutter hinge survives on the west wall of the 1877 section, indicating that at least some shutters were added.

On the 1890 east side addition, there is a pair of 6/6-light double-hung wood sash on the street front with plain board trim and wood sills. The east side has two 6/6-light double-hung wood sash with plain board trim and wood sills. It is doubtful that these are original sash. The proposed drawings for the addition call for 4/4-light sash with shutters, although it is not known what was actually installed. The rear wing has 2/2-light double-hung wood sash with plain board trim and sills in both portions.

These windows appear to be original. All windows on the house have wood-framed screens.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: On the 1877 and 1890 front section, there is a uniform transverse-gable roof with composition shingles. The 1877 portion was originally covered with wood shingles, and it is presumed that the 1890 section was originally the same. The rear section has a low, rear-facing gable roof with a kick at the east (porch) side, covered with standing-seam sheet-metal roofing. It reached its current appearance after the final addition (possibly 1926-7) to the northeast corner.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The 1877 section front has plain, open eaves on rafter extensions and no cornice framing the porch. On the left (west) side there are deep open eaves without a cornice, supported along the gable with large, chamfered triangular A-brackets. The 1890 addition has plain eaves on the front with rafter extensions and no cornice. On the gable right, east, side there are large open eaves with a bargeboard that may have once had a timber connection, similar to the original 1877

section. The rear sections have plain, open eaves and a barge-board on the rear gable. There are modern gutters and downspouts on the house, all exterior-mounted.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: See sketch plan with this report. The building is in four sections: The oldest is the 1877 plank house (southwest), which has two rooms front to back. The 1890 addition to the right of the original section (southeast) is also in two rooms, front to back, and a new doorway connects the two sections. The rear (north) addition across the northwest is ca. 1893 and contains kitchen, bath, pantry and entrance porch. The northeast corner addition completing the rectangle was early 20th century, probably 1926-7, when work of this type was done on the other houses in the NCO group. A short hall connects the 1877 section to the 1893 rear addition.
2. Stairways: The only stairway is a modern collapsible stair and trap door giving access to the attic in the middle room on the east side. There is also an attic trap door in the rear east room, but without a stair.
3. Flooring: The original wood flooring is covered first by linoleum and subsequently by wall-to-wall carpeting in the two front sections. In the rear addition vinyl tiles cover the original wood flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The front 1877 and 1890 sections have plasterboard walls; in the 1877 section, the plasterboard covers the structural plank walls. The ceiling in the 1877 portion was originally boarded and has been covered with plasterboard.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Interior doors are modern replacements, with five horizontal panels. There is a modern, flush, double, swinging door

FT. MYER: COMMISSARY  
SERGEANT'S QUARTERS  
(Building No. 42)  
HABS No. VA-1253-A (page 15)

between the kitchen and the dining room. The doorway between the two rooms in the 1877 section, as shown on the original plans, has been covered with plasterboard, and a new doorway has been cut on the east side of the room (post-1961). Similarly, a doorway has been cut through the east wall to the 1890 addition, also post-1961. The original rear doorway remains as the doorway to the kitchen.

- b. Windows: The windows have plain board trim. The two original east windows of the 1877 section were cut down to doors in the 1890 addition construction and were covered over in plasterboard after 1961.
6. Decorative features and trim: There are plain baseboards and plain window trim throughout the house, except that the front right room has molded window trim with a quirked ogee, probably original. The rear addition with board walls and ceiling has a simple crown molding, of which some has been removed and some survives. The kitchen has modern built-in base and wall cabinets, now partially removed. It was rebuilt sometime after 1961.
7. Hardware: There is no original hardware in the house. All is plain, modern, replacement hardware, ca. 1960s.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The modern, post-1961 furnace is in a utility closet off the rear service porch. The new system is forced hot air, fed through ceiling registers. The original heating for the house was by stoves connected to the central brick chimney between the two rooms of the 1877 section of the house. It is not known whether the 1890 and 1893 sections were initially equipped with central heat. However, stoves are the likely heat source, because similar equipment was used in new NCO buildings of the same period nearby. Before the forced-air system, the house was heated by hot-water radiators from a furnace in a utility closet in the present kitchen.

- b. Lighting: There are no old or notable lighting fixtures.
- c. Plumbing: There was no plumbing in the original 1877 house, and it is not believed that there was any in the 1890 bedroom addition. The rear 1893 wing included kitchen and bath, providing the first modern plumbing for this structure. A map dated 1894 shows both water and sewer lines to this building. The kitchen and bath have been modernized in the same locations. Most fixtures have been removed. There is black-and-white tile of fine quality on the bathroom floor, wainscot and tub enclosure, probably installed in 1926-7.
- d. There are no other systems to be described in the structure.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces south onto east-west Washington Avenue. This is the original road from the fort to present-day Rosslyn and via the old Aqueduct Bridge to Georgetown and Washington. The irregular path and width of Washington Avenue indicate its early origin. Leaving the fort, the road is known as Fort Myer Drive.

The house is in a block with four (formerly five) structures that formed the first group of non-commissioned officer quarters in the fort. The area is residential and adjoins a splendid group of general-officer houses to the east and bachelor-officer quarters to the south. The site is on high land that drops sharply to the east and northwest.

2. Historic landscape design: This is a freestanding house with a small front yard, cement sidewalk, and little evidence of historic landscaping. To the right (east) is an old driveway leading to the rear parking area for the houses in this block and for Buildings No. 1 and No. 2. There are small shrubs around the house, and mature trees line Washington Avenue. Behind the rear parking drive is a rear yard with play equipment and a line of young evergreen trees. At the rear of the yard is a chainlink fence with wood slats breaking the view to

FT. MYER: COMMISSARY  
SERGEANT'S QUARTERS  
(Building No. 42) -  
HABS No. VA-1253-A (page 17 )

the street at the rear.

3. Outbuildings: None.

Prepared by: James C. Massey  
Title: Project Director  
Affiliation: Massey Maxwell  
Associates  
Date: November 1988

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

A. Architectural drawings:

1. "Design for Commissary Sergts Quarts at Fort Whipple, Va-" Approx. 14" x 21". (National Archives Architectural and Cartographic Branch, Record Group 77, Misc. Fortifications File, No. 15, Fort Myer, Va.). Lithographed drawing, originally labeled "Design for Ordnance Sergts Quarts St. Augustine, Fla.," with "Ordnance" and "St. Augustine, Fla" crossed out and new information inserted in ink. 1 sheet including side elevation, cross section, plan and front elevation, plus detail section showing framing of walls. In upper left (printed as part of litho): "Memoranda: All the doors and window casings are to be nailed to the walls only at their lower ends-- a space of one inch in the clear is to be left in walls and partitions between the top of lintels and the wall plank so as to permit settlement from shrinkage without forcing the casings of doors and windows. Wooden dowels to be used to keep the edges of the planks in walls and partitions fair. /inserted here in ink: "short and not too tight"/ Walls and partitions to be of sawed stuff. They need not be dressed except to make the edges true and straight. Q.M.Genls. Office, Washington, D.C. Aug. 19 1876." Written in ink in lower left corner: "Estimated cost \$1336. Approved by Secretary of War May 8/77/ See 1583 of 1877. May 10/77 Order to Capt Rockwell--" In lower right corner, signature printed as part of litho: "M C Meigs Qr Mr Genl Aug 19, 1876." Also in ink on reverse: "I recommend that construction of a building as quarters for the Comy Sgt at Fort Whipple to contain 2 rooms & be after this plan be approved..../illegible/.....MCM" Stamped "Gen'l Meigs May 2 1877"

(Note: Detailed list of cost estimate is included in "Supplemental material" section below.)

2. "Proposed Addition to Commissary Sergeant's Quarters at Fort Myer, Va." Unsigned. Dated on reverse, Sept. 1, 1890. Shows addition of two 14' x 14' rooms, exactly doubling space of original plank structure. (National Archives, Record Group 92, E. 225, Box 709).

FT. MYER COMMISSARY  
SERGEANT'S QUARTERS  
HABS No. VA-1253-A (page 19 )

3. "Officers Quarters at Fort Whipple." National Archives Architectural and Cartographic Branch, Record Group 77, Miscellaneous Fortifications, Fort Myer, VA, No. 44. On front, lower left corner in Meigs' hand: "QMGO Apr. 12, 1875. ----- 2nd-story windows to be squareheaded not triangular. ----- to be walls of plan 4"x12" notched at corners. Partitions 3" thick 3x12 plank all laid horizontally. A 9"x6" sill under all supported on rough blocks of stone or on cedar posts. If this mode of construction does not come within its estimate try -----."

On front lower right in another hand:

"On March 30-76 - The Chief Signal Officer recommended construction of this building also one as per plate 4 of the Published Plan - (Cmdg Officers Qrs). Apl 10/75 - Approved by Sec of War, 'the cost not to exceed \$16,000 in any event' See 1329 QMGO 1875. Apl 14/75 - Orders to Maj Bell-- with the following note viz  
'the foundations are to be block, not brick walls which the Sec of War has decided to constitute permanent buildings, to be constructed only under special appropriation and sanction of Congress-- the walls to be of 4x12 scantling dressed on both sides by machinery and squared and notched and dowelled on edges -- Partitions 3x12 stuff same construction'."

B. Historic views: Library of Congress Prints and Photos: none found. Fort Myer Archives: none found. National Archives Still Pictures Branch: none found of Commissary Sergeant's Quarters. However, three 1876 Signal Corps photo views of two different sets of officers' quarters utilizing the same construction technique are on file, as well as one, dated 1892, of "Commanding Officers Quarters," that seems to show one of the 1876 buildings with a modified front porch.

C. Interviews:

1. Bethany C. Grashof, Georgia Institute of Technology, Center for Architectural Conservation, Department of Architecture. Author of A Study of United States Army Family Housing, Standardized Plans 1866-1940. (See below.) By telephone, Nov. 1, 1988.

2. Clarence Nunley, Project Manager, Engineer Activity Facility, Fort Myer, October 14, 1988. Regarding plans and other documents in fort files. Fort Myer, Oct. 12, 1988; Fort McNair, Oct. 14, 1988.
3. Constance W. Ramirez, U.S. Army Historic Preservation Officer, Washington, D.C. Discussions September-December 1988.
4. John Webb, Architect/Master Planner, Planning and Programming Division, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C. Oct. 14, 1988.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

a. Maps:

(1) National Archives Architectural and Cartographic Branch: Record Group 92, Blueprint File, Fort Myer, VA, No. 14, "Fort Myer, Va." Compiled from QMGO Dec 1894 and corrected to Nov 1897. Under direction of Captain J.W. Summerhayes, A.Q.M. U.S. Army, by A. Farley, C.E." The map bears a complete list of numbered and named buildings on the post, as well as a legend relating railroad activity on Fort Myer property. Negative copy. Approx. 30" x 46". Shows Buildings 5 (42), 6 (43), 29 (46), and 51 (45) in present locations as NCS quarters. Also shows Building 37 (44), also designated as NCS quarters, in its original location some distance to the northeast of the group of NCS quarters. Building 5 (42) shows in outline to have the 1890 two-room addition on the east side and the kitchen addition at the rear. Building 6 (43) shows a rear ell on the northeast.

(2) Record Group 92, Blueprint File, Fort Myer, VA, Unnumbered(?). "Fort Myer, Virginia." Dec. 1894. Drawn by J.G. Gosling. Approx. 28" x 40". Shows water and sewer connections, also proposed connections apparently drawn in at a later date. Building 29 (45), which also appears to have been added to the base map, was completed in 1896. This

map shows proposed water and sewer lines to the building, suggesting it was revised ca. 1895. Buildings 5 (42), 6 (43), and 51 (46) show existing water and sewer connections, probably dating from 1893, when Building 51 was completed.

(3) National Archives, Main Branch. Record Group 92 E. 225. Office of Quartermaster General 1794-1915. Box 709. "Plan of Buildings at Fort Myer, showing the water pipes and connections." On reverse: "Rec'd Jan 5, 1885, Qr Mr General's Office". Shows commissary sergeant's quarters and 1st sergeant's quarters (Bldg. 43) in present locations east of quartermaster storehouse (on site of present vacant lot), 45, and 46.

(4) Library of Congress Geography and Maps Division. G3883 .A8:2F5 1903 .H6. Howell and Taylor. "Fort Myer Heights and Wharton Addition to Fort Myer Heights near Washington, D.C." Photo-lithograph. Approx. 27" x 27". Stamped on face: "Map Division Aug 31 1903 Library of Congress." Shows buildings currently numbered 42, 43, 45, and 46 in present locations. Building 44 is not shown.

b. Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Record Group 92, National Archives. Boxes 709-710.

c. "Fort Myer, /Fort McNair Historic Preservation Plan"

2. Secondary and published sources:

Grashof, Bethany C. A Study of United States Army Family Housing, Standardized Plans 1866-1940. (Atlanta: Georgia Institute of Technology, Center for Architectural Conservation, College of Architecture, 1987) 6 vols.

Skramstad, Harold K. "The Engineer as Architect in Washington: The Contribution of Montgomery Meigs," in Records of the Columbia Historical Society of Washington, 1969-1970. (Washington: Columbia Historical Society, 1971).

Weigley, Russell F. Quartermaster General of the Union Army: A Biography of M. C. Meigs. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

F. Supplemental material:

"Estimate of cost as furnished by Capt. Rockwell April 24th  
1877--

"3500 shingles	38.50
850 ft. 4x4 Culls	17.
750 " N.C. Flooring	30.
7500 " 4x12	225.
704 " 3x8	14.08
704 " 2x12	14.08
500 " Ceiling	20.
500 " 3x6	10.
270 " 4x9 N.C.	10.80
480 " 3x6	9.60
100 " 4x4	2.
30 " stepping	1.80
300 " 4/4 dressed Lumber	18.00
200 " 6/4 " "	12.
300 " moulding	6.
mill work	50.
4300 Brick	9.
5 Window Sash	17.50
5 Window Frames	15.
3 Doors	10.50
3 Door Frames	7.50
3 " Locks	4.50
3 Pairs Hinges	.45
1 Gross Screws	.55
6 Kegs Nails	21.00
3 Sash Locks	3.00
161 Days Labor	400.00
Painting & Oiling	287.00
	-----
	\$1335.86

QMGO

May 10 1877

/inscribed on reverse of lithographed drawing labeled  
"Proposed Commissary Sergeant's Quarters at Fort Whipple."  
See above./

PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was carried out for the Norfolk District, Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army, pursuant to a Memorandum of Agreement between the Military District of Washington, U.S. Army, with the Commonwealth of Virginia Division of Historic Landmarks and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. The work was carried out under Sec. 106 and 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 USC 470f) and its implementing regulations, "protection of historic and cultural properties (36 CFR part 800). The records prepared were specified by the National Park Service Mid Atlantic Regional Office, Philadelphia, PA, and the records are for inclusion in the Historic American Buildings Survey collection in the Library of Congress, Washington, DC. The contractor for the project was Massey Maxwell Associates, Historic Preservation Consultants of Strasburg and Alexandria, VA. Personnel include:

Project Director: James C. Massey, Partner  
Historian: Shirley Maxwell, Partner  
Architect: Anne Vytlacil, AIA, Associate  
Photographer: Jack E. Boucher, Associate

The records were prepared between September 1988 and November 1988.

ARLINGTON CEMETERY

Mc NAIR RD

FORT MYER COMMISSARY SERGEANTS QUARTERS  
(BUILDING 42)  
HABS NO. VA-1253-A  
(PAGE 29)

NORTH

TO NINIAN  
GATE

1988-J. C. MASSEY  
BASED ON 1983 GENERAL SITE MAP

FORT MYER DR TO ROSSLYN

WASHINGTON AVE

HISTORIC DISTRICT BDY

GRANT AVE

JACKSON AVE

FORT MYER COMMISSARY  
SERGEANTS QUARTERS  
BUILDING 42

JOHNSTON AVE

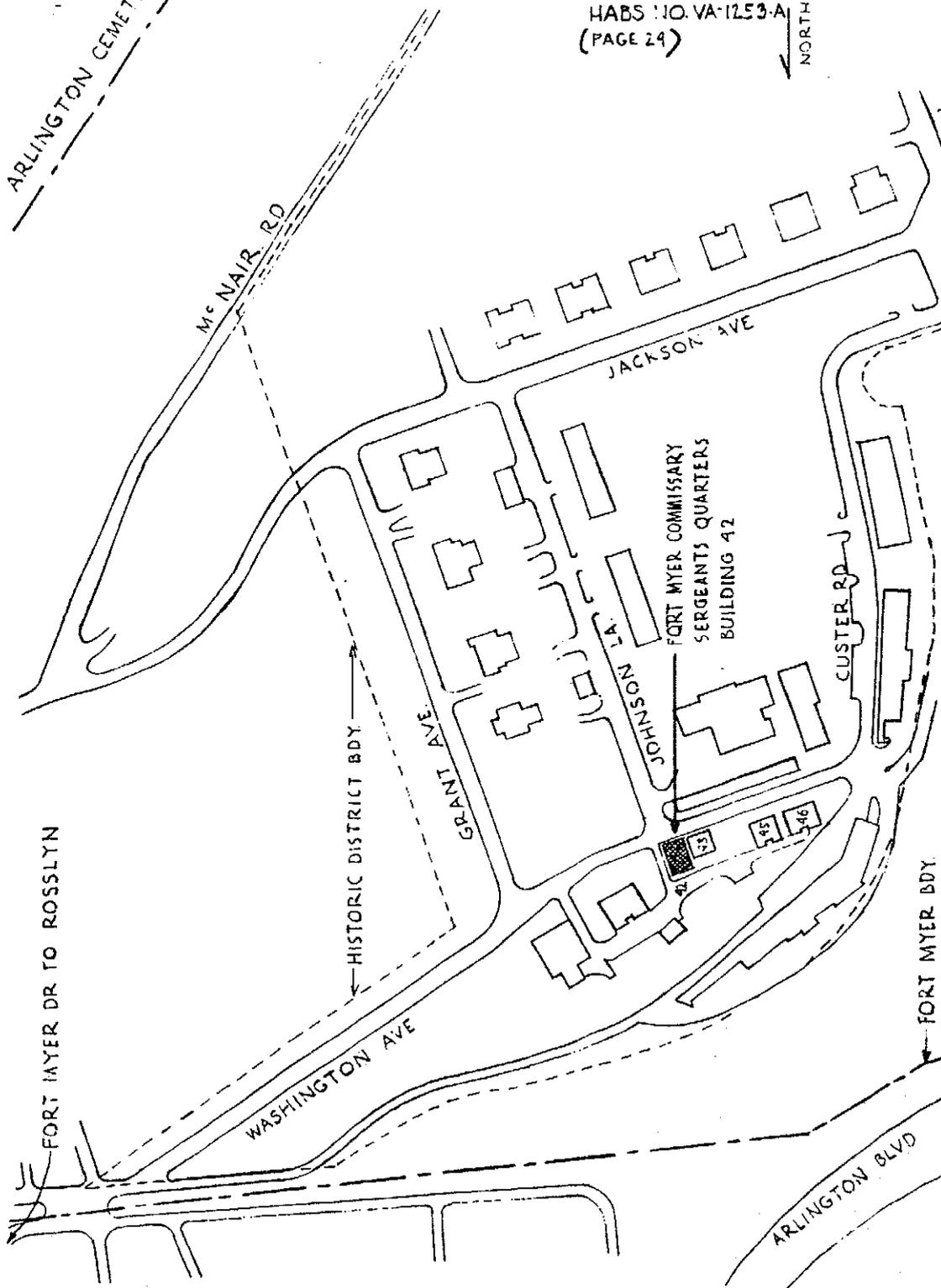
CUSTER RD

FORT MYER BDY

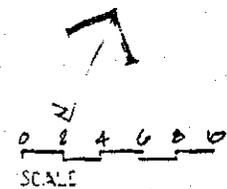
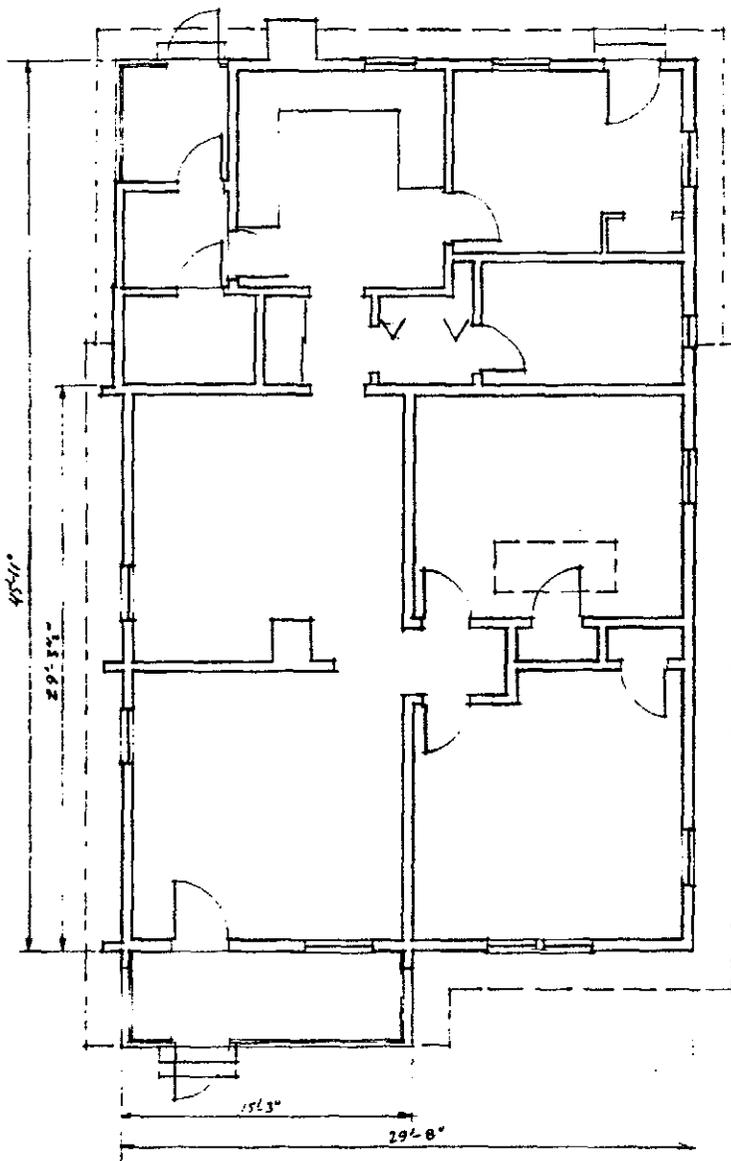
ARLINGTON BLVD

LOCATION MAP BUILDINGS 42, 43, 45, 46  
FORT MYER, FORT MYER VA.

0 25' 50' 75' 100'  
SCALE



FORT MYERS COMMISSARY SERGEANTS QUARTERS  
(BUILDING 43)  
HABS NO. VA-1253-A  
(PAGE 25)



FORT MYER, VIRGINIA - BUILDING # 43 - FIRST FLOOR PLAN  
COMMISSARY SERGEANTS QUARTERS

DES: AVYLAGIL  
DATE: NOV. 7, 1988