

Quartermaster Buildings: Records and Plans

Bolling Smith

While concrete (and earth) gun and mortar batteries are the most prominent, and permanent, structures at coastal forts, those forts were much more than just gun batteries. They were filled with all the buildings necessary to house, supply, and administer the garrison, as well as the wide variety of structures needed to make life bearable in the often isolated posts. These “non-tactical” buildings vastly outnumbered the batteries, and represented the greater reality of army life for the soldiers. These structures, commonly frame or brick, were largely constructed by the U.S. Army Quartermaster Department (Quartermaster Corps from 1912) until that responsibility was transferred to the Corps of Engineers on December 1, 1941.

The number and variety of these buildings multiplied over the years. The range of buildings is truly incredible – from commanding officers’ quarters to manure pits, from guardhouses to flagpoles. In addition, a major quartermaster responsibility was the utilities that supplied the forts—water, sewerage, electricity, and natural gas, as well as building and maintaining the docks and wharves that served as the principal transportation for so many seacoast forts.

Many forts still maintain and use examples of these attractive older buildings. Paralleling research into the gun batteries, more attention is now being devoted to the other buildings and structures, more numerous yet more fragile than the concrete batteries.

The structures of the “modern” era, those dating from approximately 1890, can be categorized chronologically, and as either permanent or temporary. These terms are more conceptual than descriptive. The distinction was whether the buildings were intended to be used for an indefinite period or whether they were intended to only be used for a short time, normally a mobilization period. Nonetheless, many “temporary” buildings built as America prepared to enter World War II remain in use today, and when properly maintained, they have in some cases outlasted “permanent” buildings.

This article will provide an introduction to the permanent structures of 1891-1917, with emphasis on archival documentation. Subsequent articles will discuss later periods of construction.

The Quartermaster Corps kept careful historical records on the buildings and structures for which it was responsible. These records were transferred to the Corps of Engineers along with the responsibility for construction and maintenance. At Archives II in College Park, MD, Entries 393 and 394, RG 77 (Records of the Chief of Engineers), contain many of these records, arranged generally in alphabetical order by post. Entry 393 contains the records of “active” posts, 1905-1942, while the much smaller Entry 394 contains the records of “abandoned” posts, 1905-1924.

The “Historical Record of Buildings” described individual structures. The term building was used in the broadest sense, and included wharfs, manure pits, tennis courts, and even statues.

The first such forms in the record, dating from 1905, are un-numbered. They contain information on two buildings, one on each side of the 10 x 12 card-stock form. Filed by post building number, the forms list the construction date, materials, and equipment (to include wash basins, showers, urinals, screen doors, and wall lockers), as well as an annual list of expenditures for repairs. Perhaps most valuable, the forms normally displayed a 4 x 5-inch black and white photograph of the structure. While some of these photographs are dark and some have faded, many are extremely sharp, showing gleaming new buildings, or in some cases, failing remnants from the last century. Occasionally, a terse notation will be

found to the effect that “Structure is underground, hence no photograph” (in the case of a reservoir), “No photography permitted” (in the case of a magazine), or “Structure burned before photograph could be taken.” As a group, however, these photographs provide an unparalleled glimpse of the actual appearance of these forts almost 100 years ago. With the buildings mostly gone, these photographs are our best information on how they actually looked.

In 1913, the forms were designated Form 173 a. By 1921, the forms, now 173 A, were enlarged to 10 x 14 inches and covered only one structure. On the reverse a grid pattern was provided for a simple plan of the structure. Plans were drawn for some structures; others had blueprints pasted on, while still others were blank. In 1924, the form was renumbered 117, but otherwise remained relatively unchanged.

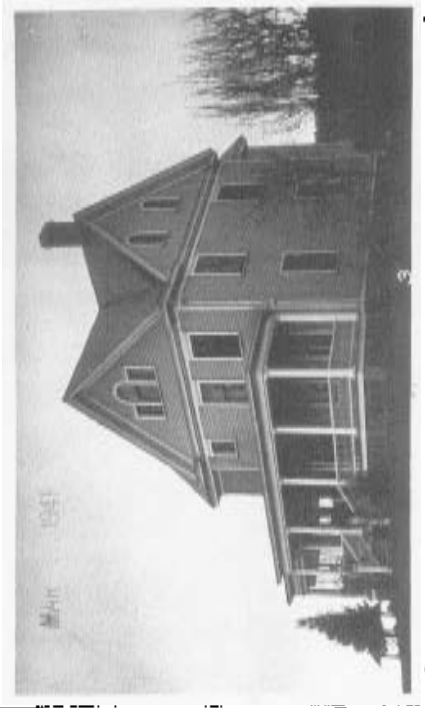
These forms cover buildings built until the Corps of Engineers assumed responsibility days before the United States entered World War II. Both permanent and temporary buildings are included, as well as a number of civilian structures taken over by the army when the land on which they stood became part of a military post.

Quarters, which included barracks and houses for officers and NCOs, along with the buildings that most closely represented the service, such as administration buildings, guardhouses, post exchanges, and theaters, tended to be attractive buildings. Built in a number of styles at different posts, they were intended to create an atmosphere of attractive order. The surviving quarters at Fort Worden, WA, are excellent examples of this sense of style and appearance of class. Figure 1 shows a modern view of the commanding officer’s quarters at Fort Worden, WA. Figure 2 is a copy of the Form 117 for this building, while Figure 3 is an enlargement of the photo on this form.



Figure 1.

Post Plan No.
 O.Q.M.C.: Plan No. **1374** Building No. **3**



WATER DEPARTMENT
 QUANTICON, VIRGINIA

Place Fort Corbett, Washington
 Designation of building Field Officer Quarters Capacity 1 Enlist. Off.
 Date completed April 15, 1904
 Total no. of floors 2
 Materials: Walls Stone
 Roof Shale
 Total floor area above basement, square feet 2,110 Basement 1,100
 Size: Main building 17' x 53' Wings None Height of first floor above ground 4'
 Foundation Block
Oil burner Automatic Oil Burner
 Stairs None Low lighted Electricity
Automatic Oil Water Heater Water connections Yes
 Gas connections Yes
 REFRIGERATORS INSTALLED None
 COOKING RANGES INSTALLED None
 Meters installed:
 Gas None
 Electric 21-46 115VAC-60 220
 Water None
 Sewer None

Approval of Secretary of War
 as required by Act of August 2, 1902

ADDITIONS AND INSTALLATIONS
 These enter chronologically all modifications, additions, alterations, repairs, removals, etc.

| DATE | DESCRIPTION | COST | DATE | COST |
|--------|---|-----------|------|------|
| 2/6/01 | Total amount expended up to and including 1.1.1900 for maintenance, repair and alteration | 15,480.75 | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Insurances: None
 State whether bonded from rental leasing or the initial building plans, survey, furniture or equipment.
 State whether bonded from rental leasing or the initial building plans, survey, furniture or equipment.
 State whether bonded from rental leasing or the initial building plans, survey, furniture or equipment.

Figure 2.



Figure 3.

Supporting buildings, on the other hand, tended to be more utilitarian. Without the stylistic embellishments of the buildings that served to represent the army, the supporting structures were normally simple frame buildings, although the prevalence of galvanized tin structures is surprising.

One of the most important entries on the "Historical Record of Buildings," was the OQMG (Office of the Quartermaster General) plan number, which was normally listed, at least for 1891-1917 buildings. These plan numbers, in turn, lead to another valuable source. From 1891 through 1917, the quartermasters built most structures to numbered standard plans. As these plans were updated, letter suffixes were added. Thus, for example, standard plans No. 120 were for a double set of officers' quarters, and standard plans No. 120-E were for duplex lieutenant's quarters.

The Cartographic Branch at Archives II contains "Standard Plans of Army Post Buildings (Received from Quartermaster Office) 1891-1917." These are hundreds of standard plans prepared by the Office of the Quartermaster General. A notebook lists the plans by number and suffix, with the number of sheets prepared. To request them, merely specify RG 77, PI NM-19, "Standard Plans of Army Post Buildings 1891-1917," with the plan number and letter suffix desired. The number of sheets varies from one to more than a dozen, and averages around eight or nine for larger structures. The plans are in ink on linen, usually about 24 x 37 inches. For most buildings there are front, rear, and side elevations, and plans for each floor. These plans show structural details, as well as plumbing, heating, and lighting fixtures. The remaining sheets show smaller details, such as doors, windows, coal chutes, and furniture such as cupboards and dressers. The scale for the elevations and plans is usually $\frac{1}{4}$ inch = 1 foot, while the scale for the details varies from $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to 3 inches = 1 foot.

Figures 4 through 11 show Standard Plans No. 145 A, which were used for the commanding officer's quarters at Fort Worden.



Figure 4.



REAR ELEVATION
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

DESIGNED BY
OFFICERS' QUARTERS
1854
1454
OF OFFICERS' QUARTERS
1854
1454



SIDE ELEVATION
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

Figure 5.

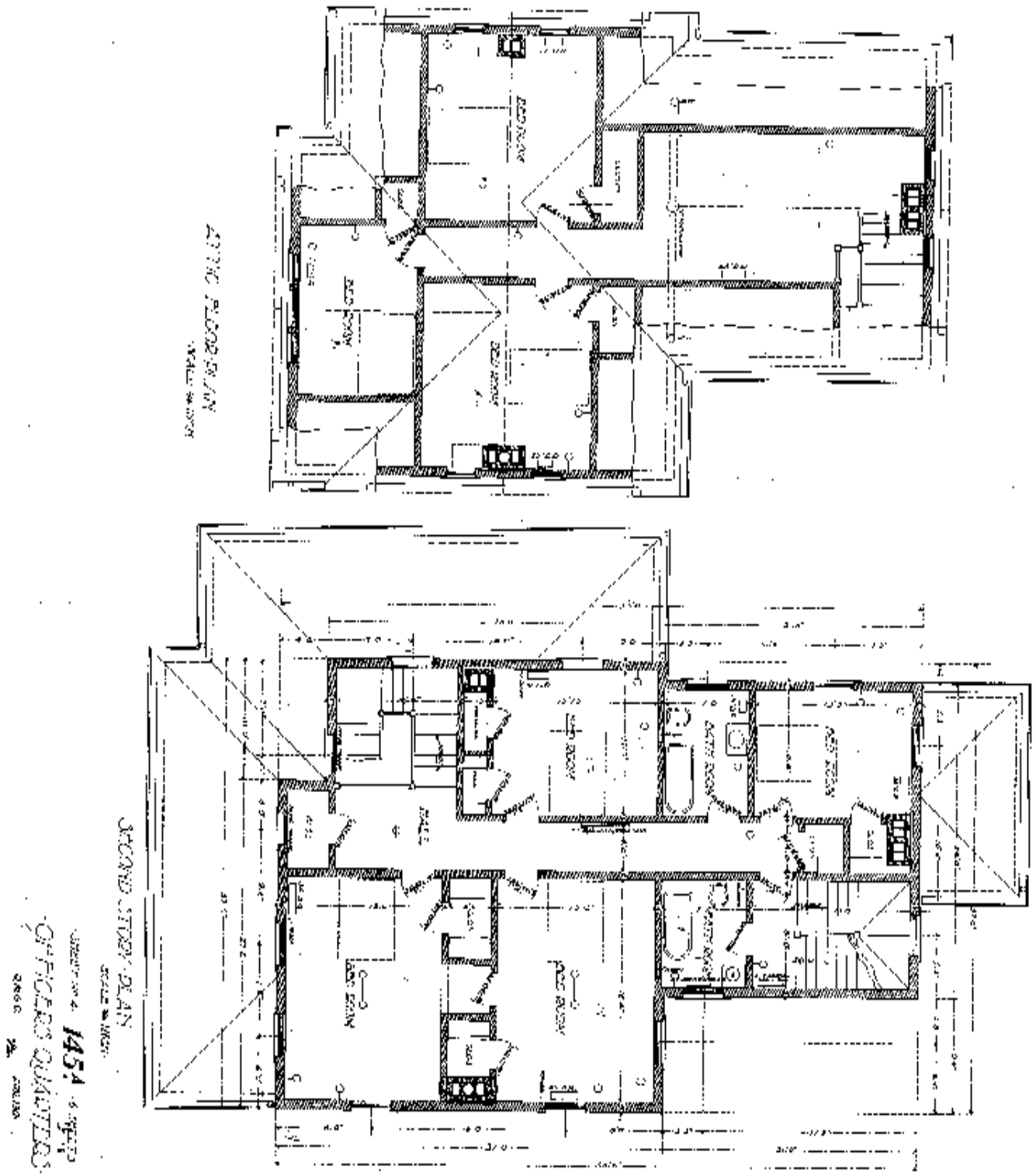


Figure 7.

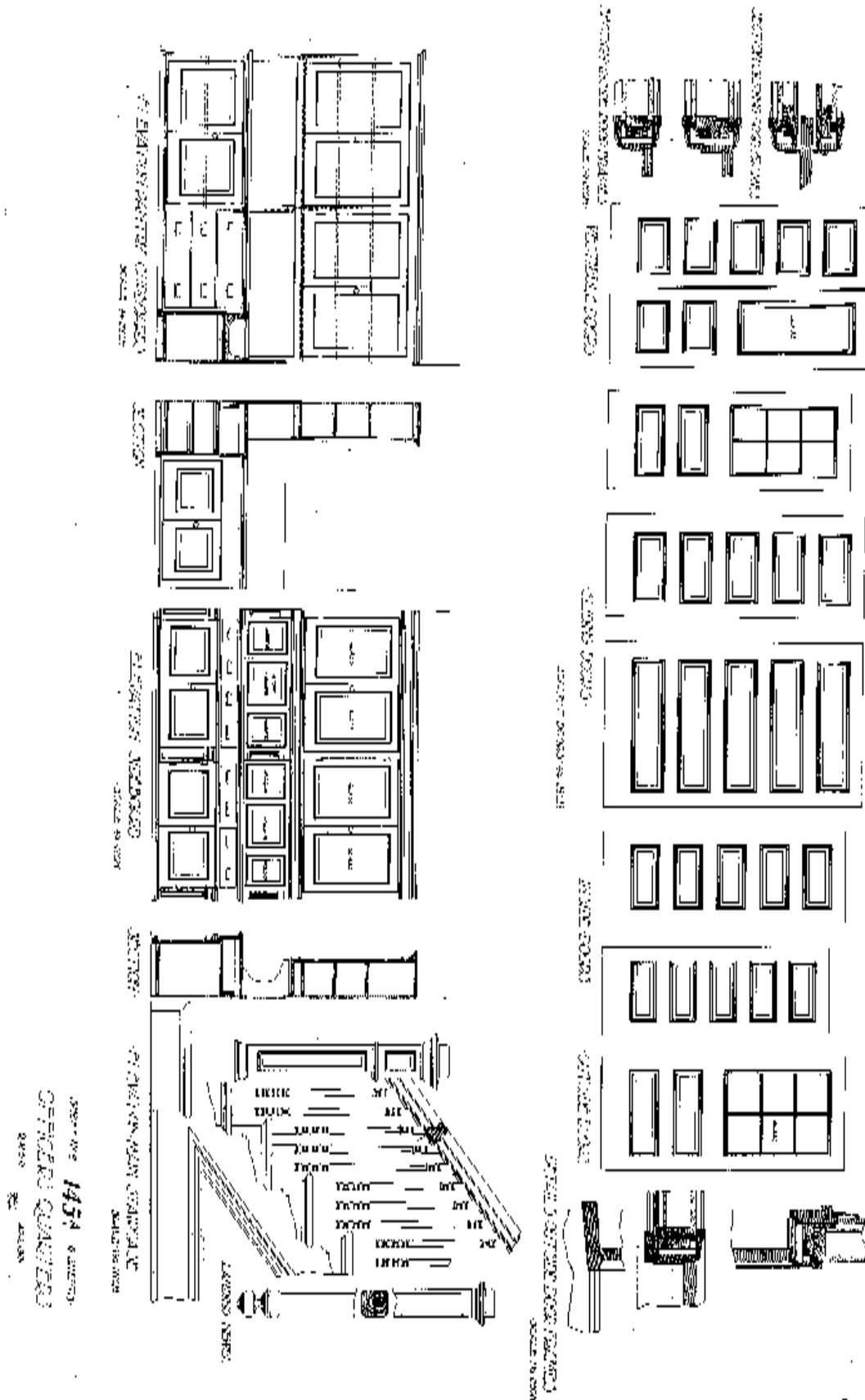


Figure 9.

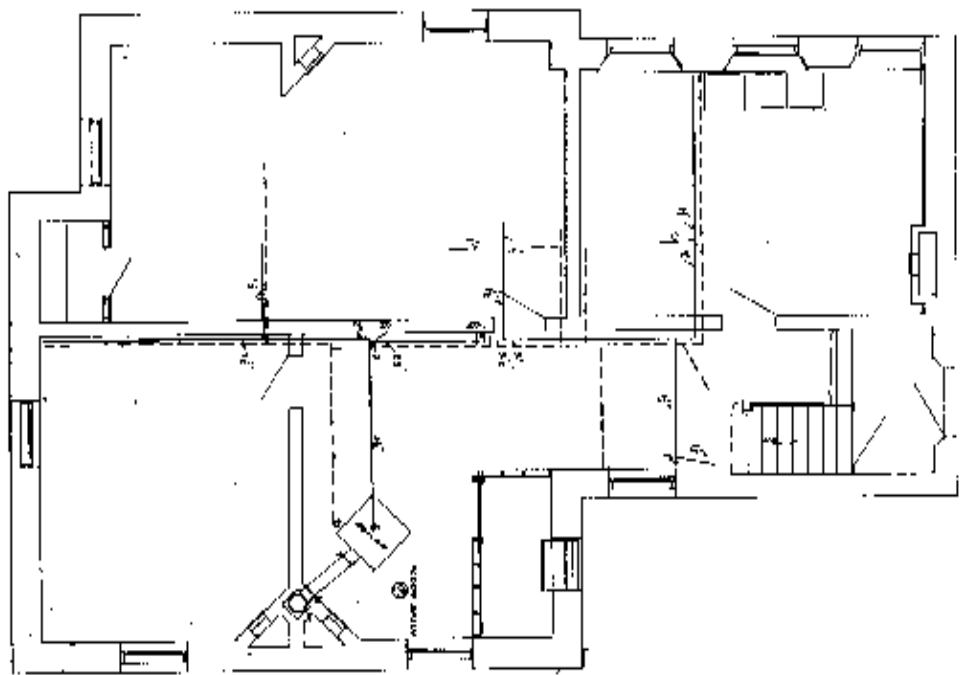
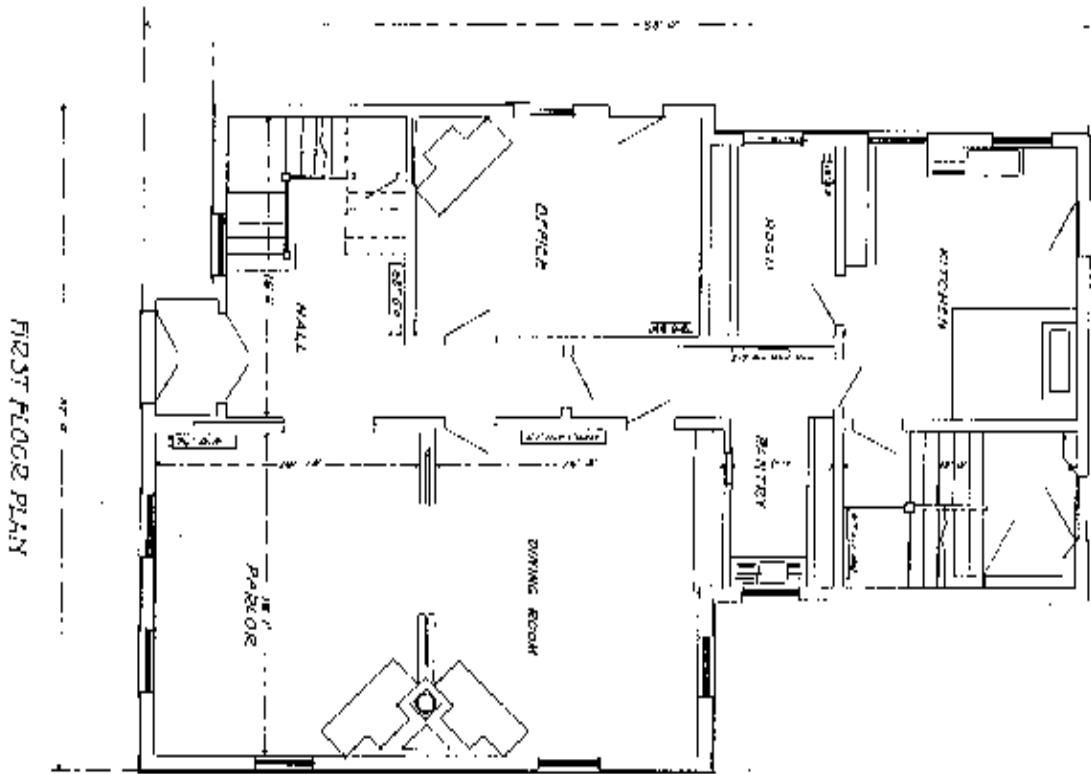
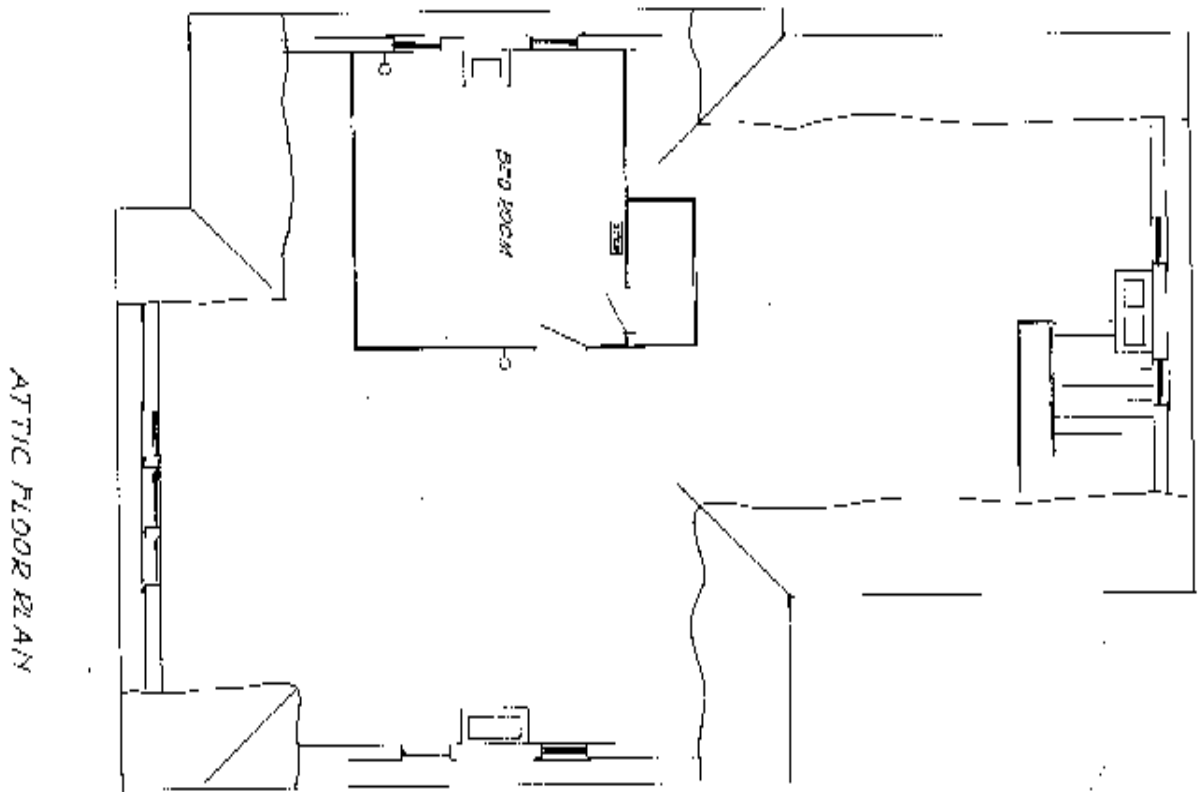
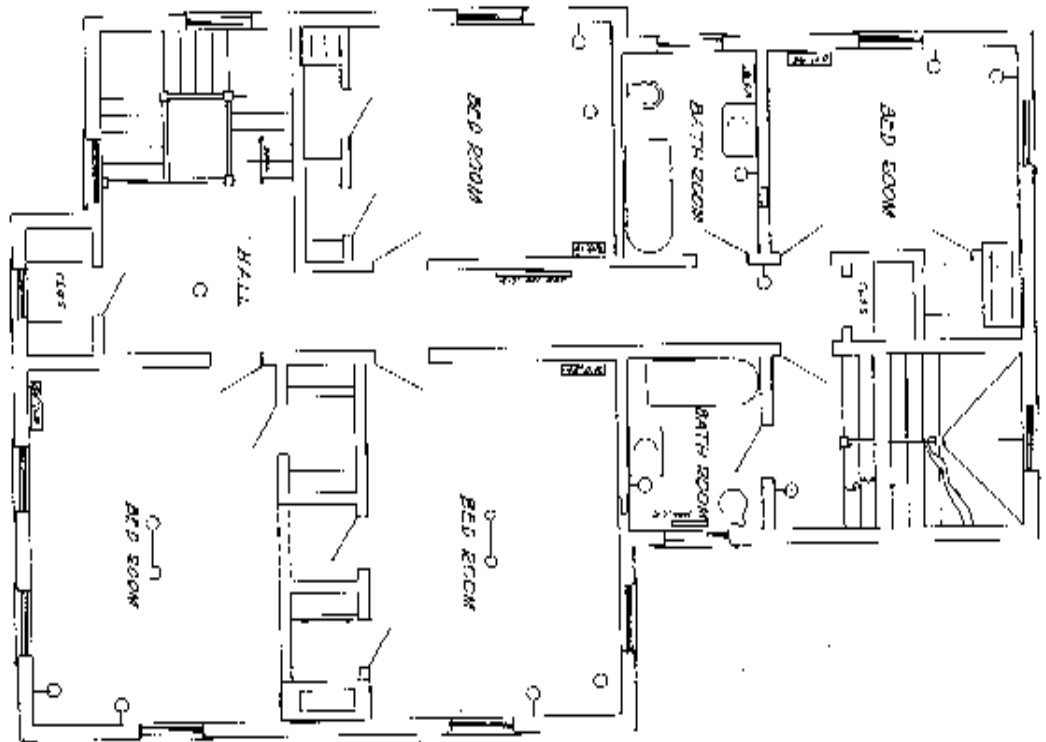


Figure 10.



ATTIC FLOOR PLAN



SECOND STORY PLAN

HOT WATER HEATING 120°
UNDERFLOOR
145A
OFFICERS' QUARTERS
41450
JAN 1917

Figure 11.

Most post buildings of this era are gone, but a number survive at coastal forts around the country. Luckily, there are surviving buildings in almost every coastal region of the country. While many forts have a few buildings, the best places to see original buildings are probably the following:

Fort Worden State Park, Port Townsend, WA, was transferred from the military with most buildings in good shape. The state has turned most of the buildings into a conference center, renting out the barracks and other buildings. Fort Casey, Whidby Island, WA, did not fare as well as Fort Worden. Many buildings, including the barracks, were torn down in the 1930s, although new barracks were built during WW II. Most of the garrison area went to Seattle Pacific University, for use as an extension campus. Surviving structures include a number of officers' and NCO quarters. At Fort Flagler State Park, WA, remaining post buildings include the hospital, hospital steward's quarters, a few storehouses, and the WW II barracks. At Fort Ward on Bainbridge Island, a number of garrison buildings survive in private hands, most converted into residences.

Fort Columbia, on the Columbia River, is an excellent example of a small Endicott-era fort. Built at the turn of the last century, the post was turned over to the state largely intact. The barracks, three officers' quarters, hospital and hospital steward's quarters, the quartermaster building, fire station, guardhouse, and ordnance storehouse remain. A number of structures survive at Fort Stevens, Hammond, OR, most in private hands.

In and around San Francisco, CA, major building collections at the forts under the care of the National Park Service and at Fort McDowell (now Angel Island State Park) date from the 1850s through WW II. Buildings remain from the 1910s at Fort Winfield Scott, and Forts Baker and Barry on the Marin Headlands. Fort Chronkhite, north of Fort Barry on the Marin Headlands, is one of the few remaining intact WW II posts, and retains a number of temporary buildings from that era.

At Fort MacArthur, Los Angeles (San Pedro), CA, the "mission-revival" style parade ground area retains the original barracks, guardhouse, post exchange, and officers' quarters, as well as a number of buildings built in the 1930s and 1940s.

Fort Barrancas, Pensacola, FL, was headquarters for the HD of Pensacola, and later for the 13th Coast Artillery Regiment, although never armed with any modern seacoast cannon. Today the large naval air station uses the old garrison area of Fort Barrancas. Many of the officers' quarters are still in use, as are a number of supporting structures. Across the bay at Fort Pickens, part of the Gulf Islands National Seashore, several frame buildings survive.

The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina purchased Fort Caswell, Oak Island, NC, with over 70 buildings in various states of repair. They have refurbished most of the buildings for use as classrooms, residence rooms and halls, auditoriums, administrative offices, and maintenance facilities. The overall appearance of the buildings and batteries remains largely unchanged.

Fort Monroe, VA, still an active army post, contains a wide variety of buildings, some well over 100 years old. Quarters Robert E. Lee once occupied as an engineer officer are still in use today, as are many other buildings.

In the defenses of the Delaware, a number of concrete-block buildings survive at Fort Miles. These World War II buildings are being researched, but for now the exact reason for their unusual construction remains uncertain. Fort DuPont State Park, Delaware City, DE, has been used for a number of years by the State of Delaware as a record storage facility, civil defense center, and mental hospital. More than half of the buildings at this post remain, including the barracks, a number of officers' quarters, the administration building, and storehouses.

Fort Hancock, Sandy Hook, NJ, contains the largest and most diverse set of structures of the early modern era, 1890-1920. The army ordnance proving grounds were here until 1920, in addition to the large coast artillery garrison. Consequently, the army built a large number of buildings and facilities at this site, most of which remain today. The yellow-brick coast artillery buildings contrast with the redbrick Ordnance Department buildings. The National Park Service has worked to stabilize these structures and find adaptive reuses for them. While not in as good shape as the buildings in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the Sandy Hook collection preserves the essence of a large coast artillery post and has a number of unique features not found at any other post.

Fort Totten, New York City, was occupied by various army and state government units until recently and the city is now deciding what to do with the fort. This reservation has a wonderful collection of non-tactical buildings, most in relatively good shape, in an unusually attractive setting.

Fort Andrews, Peddocks Island, Boston Harbor, MA, includes more than 30 abandoned circa-1900 buildings. Deemed eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, Fort Andrews is the only Endicott-era military reservation in the Boston area retaining the preponderance of its historic core of permanent buildings. The complex, however, is currently overgrown, with many of the buildings in dilapidated condition.

Fort McKinley, Great Diamond Island, Portland, ME, has an excellent collection of turn-of-the-century brick buildings, including its administration building, officers and non-commissioned officers' quarters, barracks, guard house, hospital, bakery, fire station, post exchange, bowling alley, quartermaster storehouses, ordnance storehouse, ordnance shop, workshop, stable, water pumping station, water tanks, well shelters, central power house, ice pond, and quartermaster wharf. The fort is on the National Register of Historic Places and so the exterior of the buildings are maintained as originally built. The private condominium association that owns the Fort McKinley has made great efforts to maintain the external appearance of the buildings while allowing adaptive reuse.

Fort Preble, South Portland, ME, now the campus of Southern Maine Technical College, retains most of its turn-of-the-century buildings, although a number have been minimally altered and new buildings have been constructed among them. The buildings on the parade ground—the administration building, hospital, and barracks - look much as they did at the turn of the century. Behind these are the guardhouse (with an addition), fire station, and bakery, which have been minimally altered. On the hill above the parade ground are four officers' quarters, one of which has been turned into a hospitality center. Below the officers' quarters are a World War II mobilization building, a quartermaster storehouse (with a wood frame addition), a cable tank, ordnance machine shop, and ordnance storehouse.

At Fort Williams, Cape Elizabeth, ME, a few excellent structures survive—a captain's quarters, bachelor officers' quarters, artillery engineer's storehouse, fire station, central powerhouse, and electrical substation. Also on site are the National Guard (formerly militia) storehouse and the National Guard gun shed where the 155 mm guns were housed.

