

Presidio, Cavalry Stables (Building No. 661)  
Cowles Street, Between Lincoln Blvd. and McDowell St.  
Golden Gate National Recreation Area  
San Francisco  
San Francisco County  
California

HABS No. CA-2405

HABS  
CAL  
38-SANFRA,  
175-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Western Region  
Department of the Interior  
San Francisco, California 94107

# HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

## PRESIDIO, CAVALRY STABLES (Building No. 661)

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### Location:

Cowles Street, between Lincoln Boulevard and McDowell Avenue  
Presidio of San Francisco  
Golden Gate National Recreation Area  
San Francisco  
San Francisco County  
California

### Significance:

Within the Presidio, the cavalry stables form a distinct and rather isolated building complex with a unique character. Although they were constructed during the period when the Mission style had been introduced as the dominant style at the Presidio (ca. 1912-), architecturally, they relate more to the nationwide brick building traditions seen in the area of the Main Post than to the reinforced-concrete construction and regionally-inspired Spanish-derived influences seen at Fort Winfield Scott.

Individually, Building 661 was the first of the stables to be constructed. Although its interior has undergone substantial alteration, the exterior form, materials, and massing remain, making it an important element of the stables group. Its interior still includes the only remaining horse stalls at the Presidio and other original features.

### Description:

Exterior: Building 661, typical of all five cavalry stables, is a one and a half story structure approximately 67 feet by 185 feet in plan. It is constructed of red common bond brick on a concrete foundation. The gable roof is broken by a continuous monitor extending the length of the building. Both the gable roofs and the monitor roof and walls are slate clad. The exposed rafters have attached fascia boards and rest on a broad wall plate. Wooden "loading" beams project from the gable ends, which each have a central doorway at the upper level.

Segmental arched entrances have ham-type sliding batten doors or wood paneled doors (some entrances are now altered with smaller wood-paneled doors; one door in the northeast end has been replaced with a metal overhead

door). Concrete fenders are located at the bottom of door surrounds. Window openings are segmental arches with architrave molding and double-hung sash windows, six-over-six, with concrete lug sills. There are shorter casement windows, some with board infill, and some windows with iron bars. Clerestory windows are either double casement types with six lights each, or vents.

Adjacent to the building to the north (former corral area) are a watering trough and a cement horseshoe shape in the dirt.

Interior: The building's ground level originally housed stalls for 102 horses. The main portion of the ground floor retains its open configuration. The central portion of the floor is concrete, while the flooring in the stall areas running the length of the space along the side walls is wood plank. Four rows of wood posts support beams running the length of the building. A gypsum board wall without openings separates the four southeastern bays from the rest of the building. There are several small rooms at the northwest end of the building, some with their original narrow beaded board walls. The remains of three horse stalls are along the southwest wall. Windows in the large spaces have six lights and slide into wood framed pockets on the interior of the masonry walls. The smaller rooms have larger double-hung windows. Wall and ceiling finishes are either vertical or horizontal wood planks or gypsum board. Lighting in these rooms is from suspended fluorescent fixtures. There is no artificial lighting in the stable space.

The upper level, reached via two exterior stairs, has a series of central finished spaces running the length of the building below the monitor, with accessible attic space on either side. These are lighted by the clerestory windows. The roof structure is exposed in each space: the two large northwestern spaces have suspended ceilings above the windows, with beams at gable roof height spanning the space; in the two southeastern spaces both the cross beams and the roof structure above are exposed. A toilet and shower room also has a dropped ceiling and typical windows. The central space at the northwest end has several smaller finished rooms opening off each side. These rooms have no natural lighting; they have sloped ceilings with the remnants of skylights, now covered over by roofing. Upper floor finishes are similar to those on the ground floor.

Alterations:<sup>1</sup> This is a list of alterations known at this time; it is not intended to be a complete chronology. Note: directional notations below are based on the northwest end of the building being called "plan north".

- 1913 Building constructed.
- 19-- Additional louvered vents constructed along main roof section, north elevation.
- 1929 One fire hydrant and two outlets installed in structure, also two Class B light fixtures for lights in office and sleeping room.
- 1932 Air Gas #35 heater installed.
- 1936 Gas-fired 30 gallon heater installed.
- 1940 A report on the building this year stated: "Signs made and installed. Window panes replaced. Downspouts removed."
- 1941 Mangers and fronts of box stalls removed.
- 19-- Slate roof removed and replaced with red rolled composition roofing material.
- 19-- Sheetrock wall constructed, up four bays from south end of structure.
- 19-- Concrete floor poured throughout structure.
- 19-- Wooden fire escape constructed, south end of structure.
- 19-- Overhead aluminum replacement door installed, north gable end.
- 19-- New window cut in east wall of northernmost office room, western side of building.
- 19-- Loft area upstairs completely altered: extended entire length of building; large rooms partitioned off; walls finished; fluorescent lights installed.
- 1994 Composition roofing replaced with slate roofing, similar to the original roofing.

Remaining Character-defining Features:<sup>2</sup>

Exterior

- Building form, shape, materials, silhouette.
- Common bond brickwork with headers every sixth row
- Stone or cast stone sills.
- Decorative brackets under eaves.
- Slate shingle finish on monitor roof walls.
- Fenestration pattern.
- Paired nine-light sliding windows often alternating with paired louvered vents in monitor.

<sup>1</sup> Laura Harrison, Presidio Physical History Report, Building Inventory,

<sup>2</sup> Laura Harrison.

- Segmentally arched door and window openings in brick wall fields.
- Stone or cast stone wheel guards at stable entrance doors.
- Tie rings for lead ropes in brick wall.
- Hoist beams above loft entrance doors in gable end walls.
- Historic paired entrance doors on sliding tracks at sides and gable ends, with three inset panels infilled with diagonal tongue-and-groove siding set in herringbone pattern.
- Monitor roof entire length of structure, gable end to gable end.

#### Interior

- Remaining open room configuration.
- First three rooms, north corner of structure, with walls of thin beaded tongue-and-groove siding.
- First two rooms, west corner of structure.
- Remnants of three stalls, southwest wall, central section (not complete, but the only stalls or portions thereof left at the Presidio).
- Wide plank floors at northeast wall, southeast end (probably left over from the warehouse period).
- Six-light sliding windows in former stall areas.
- Exposed structure and its pattern and regularity, including 8x8 posts, trusses and rafters.
- Wide, beaded tongue-and-groove shutters (top-hinged) for every other window in monitor.

**Historical Context:** In 1911, San Francisco was designated as the site for a Panama-Pacific International Exposition. The site selected for the fair included 287 acres of largely unoccupied land in the Lower Presidio. Among the few structures in this area were the cavalry stables, the first of these dating from 1862-1864.<sup>3</sup> Maps from 1906 through 1909 show a rather large complex of stables in the area just north of the Main Post.

A 1909 description of the cavalry stables in the Lower Presidio painted an ugly picture. The buildings were mere shells, open, without doors. The mangers were in poor shape and the galvanized feed boxes unfit for use. Located on low marshy ground the stable floors were frequently under water in winter. and the unpaved yards were too low

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<sup>3</sup> Erwin N. Thompson and Sally B. Woodbridge, Special History Study -- Presidio of San Francisco, An Outline of its Evolution as a U. S. Army Post, 1847-1990, p. 18 and map #12.

for drainage.<sup>4</sup> Both these conditions and the commitment of Lower Presidio land to the Exposition led to a need for relocation of the stables.

Both Daniel Burnham's plan of 1905 and Major Harts' 1907 plan proposed a complex of new stables (or "corral") to be located east of a large Drill Plain along the shoreline north of the Main Post. A plan of the Exposition indicates that this area was used for livestock exhibits, including stables associated with the fair's race track/drill ground. Major Harts' plan also showed stables at the southwest corner of the drill field. Around this time, five new stables (Buildings 661, 662, 663, 667, and 668) were included in a program for new construction prepared by the Quartermaster Department. Of the estimated \$400,000 in new construction that was proposed, only the stables were erected, southwest of the drill field as shown by Harts.<sup>5</sup>

The stables' design was based on a conventional form used by the military for buildings of this function, taken from standard drawings and specifications issued by the Office of the Quartermaster General (OQMG) in Washington, D. C. Building 661 was constructed in 1913 for \$35,200. Buildings 662, 663, 667 and 668, all nearly identical to 661, and each housing 102 horses, were completed in 1914 at a cost of approximately \$20,000 each.

The Presidio's 1st Cavalry, whose responsibility it had been since 1890 to protect Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks, had been stationed at Monterey. They returned to San Francisco in February 1915 to perform drills for the Exposition, returning to Monterey in November of that year. The stables were occupied by Cavalry troops until, by 1937, the post quartermaster claimed all five buildings. In 1938, Building 661 was transferred from Fort Scott to the Presidio of San Francisco. It has found use as offices, classrooms, a firing range, meeting rooms and, most recently, as a general supply warehouse.

**Sources:**

National Register of Historic Places Registration Forms,  
Presidio of San Francisco National Historic Landmark  
Update.

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<sup>4</sup> Thompson, *Defender of the Gate -- The Presidio of San Francisco, A History 1846-1994*, December 1994 Draft, p. 269.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, *Defender of the Gate*, map #10.

Quartermaster Corps Form 117, Presidio Army Museum.

Laura Harrison, Presidio Physical History Report, Building Inventory.

Erwin N. Thompson and Sally B. Woodbridge, Special History Study -- Presidio of San Francisco, An Outline of its Evolution as a U. S. Army Post, 1847-1990.

Erwin N. Thompson. Defender of the Gate -- The Presidio of San Francisco, A History 1846-1994, December 1994 Draft.

**Project Information:**

Current status: Building 661 will be rehabilitated for use by the National Park Service for their horse mounted police unit. The building will be renovated for this occupancy, which is similar to its original use. Part of the original spatial character of the building will be restored by removal of floor and wall systems which were added many years after the construction of the building.

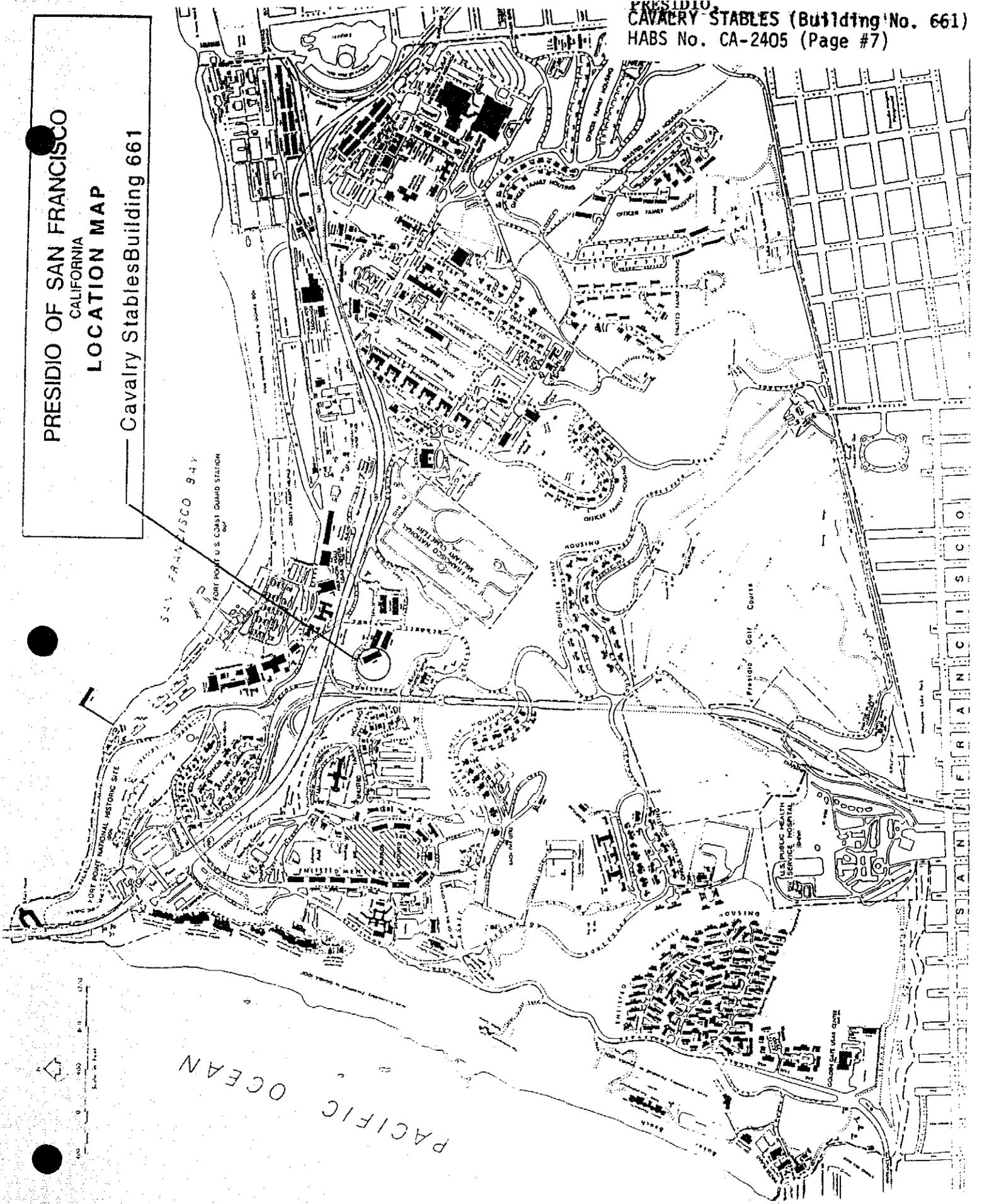
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Date: January 1995

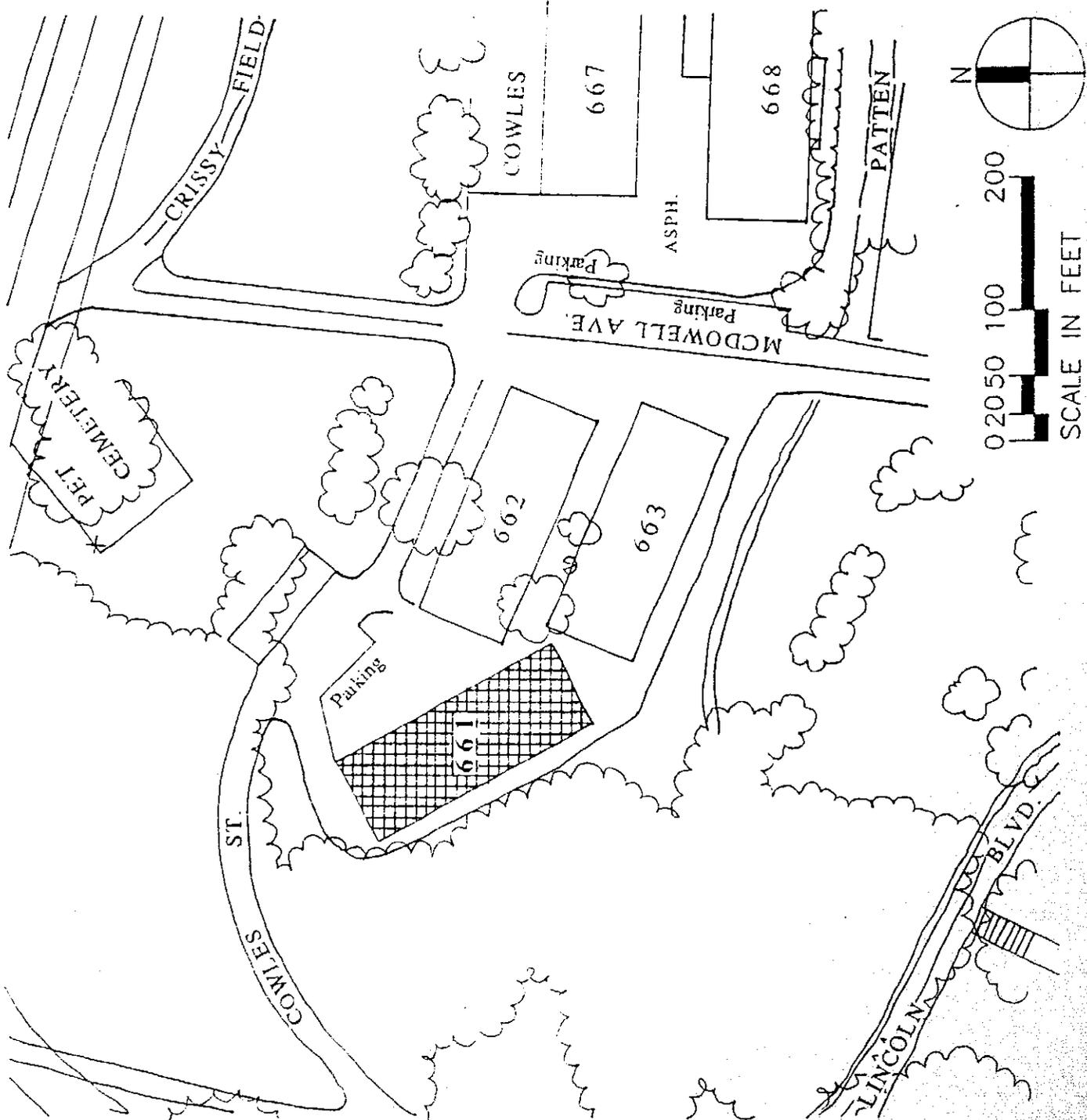
PRESIDIO OF SAN FRANCISCO  
CALIFORNIA  
LOCATION MAP

Cavalry Stables Building 661



# Site Plan Cavalry Stables Presidio of San Francisco

PRESIDIO, CAVALRY STABLES (Building No. 661)  
HABS No. CA-2405 (Page #8)



PRESIDIO PHYSICAL HISTORY REPORT  
BUILDING INVENTORY

BUILDING NUMBER: 661 (former Presidio number 172; old Fort Scott numbers 71 and 209)

O.Q.M.G. PLAN NUMBER: Unknown

NAME: Stables (Furniture Warehouse; offices, firing range, meeting rooms, classrooms; current use: general supply warehouse)

PLAN TYPE: One story brick stable for 102 animals with loft

BUILDING CHRONOLOGY:

- 1913 Building constructed for \$35,200.
- 19-- Additional louvered vents constructed along main roof section, north elevation.
- 1929 One fire hydrant and two outlets installed in structure, also two Class B light fixtures for lights in office and sleeping room.
- 1932 Air Gas #35 heater installed in the building.
- 1936 Gas-fired 30 gallon CV 709 heater installed in the building.
- 1938 Building transferred from Fort Scott to Presidio of San Francisco.
- 1940 A report on the building this year stated: "Signs made and installed. Window panes replaced. Downspouts removed."
- 1941 Mangers and fronts of box stalls removed.
- 19-- Slate roof removed and replaced with red rolled composition roofing material.
- 19-- Sheetrock wall constructed, up four bays from south end of structure.
- 19-- Concrete floor poured throughout structure.
- 19-- Wooden fire escape constructed, south end of building.
- 19-- Overhead aluminum replacement door installed, north gable end, east side.
- 19-- New window cut in east wall of northernmost office room, western side of building.

- 19-- Loft area upstairs completely altered: extended entire length of building; large rooms partitioned off; walls finished; fluorescent lights installed.

CHARACTER-DEFINING/SIGNIFICANT FEATURES:

EXTERIOR:

HIGHLY SENSITIVE TO ALTERATION:

- building form, shape, materials, silhouette
- common bond brickwork with headers every sixth row
- stone or cast stone sills
- decorative brackets under eaves
- slate shingle finish on monitor roof walls
- fenestration pattern
- paired nine-light sliding windows often alternating with paired louvered vents in monitor
- segmentally arched door and window openings in brick wall fields
- stone or cast stone wheel guards, stable entrance doors
- tie rings for lead ropes, brick wall
- hoist beams above loft entrance doors, gable end walls
- historic paired entrance doors on sliding tracks, sides and gable ends, with three inset panels infilled with diagonal tongue-and-groove siding set in herringbone pattern
- monitor roof entire length of structure, gable end to gable end

LESS SENSITIVE TO ALTERATION:

- paint finish on lower areas of brick walls
- paint finish on stone or cast stone sills
- red rolled composition roofing finish on roof

INTERIOR:

HIGHLY SENSITIVE TO ALTERATION:

- remaining open room configuration
- first three rooms, northeast corner of structure with walls of thin, beaded tongue-and-groove siding
- first two room, northwest corner of structure
- remnants of three stalls, west wall, south-central section (not complete, but the only stalls or portions thereof left at the Presidio)
- wide plank floors, east wall, south end (probably left over from warehouse period)
- six-light sliding windows in former stall areas
- exposed structure and its pattern and regularity, including 8x8 posts, trusses and rafters
- wide, beaded tongue-and-groove shutters (top-hinged) for every other window in monitor

LESS SENSITIVE TO ALTERATION:

- additional partitions
- cosmetic finishes

OVERALL ARCHITECTURAL: The building has undergone a substantial amount of alteration. Its silhouette, materials, and massing, however, assist in its architectural contribution to the group of stable structures. The remnants of the stalls are a significant feature.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: This building was the first of the group of five stables to be constructed.

Adjacent to the building on its north side (former corral area) are a watering trough and a cement horseshoe shape in the dirt.

DATE OF SITE VISIT: 8/18/92

SOURCES:

National Archives, Record Group 77, Entry 391, Box 262 D, Volume 8, "Rehabilitation of Army Post," completed 10/7/40.

National Archives, Record Group 77, Entry 393, Box 199, Quartermaster Corps Form 117.

National Historic Landmark Nomination Form, available at Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Quartermaster Corps Form 117, Presidio Army Museum.

Thompson, Erwin N. and Sally B. Woodbridge, Special History Study--Presidio of San Francisco, An Outline of Its Evolution as a U.S. Army Post, 1847-1990.

