

U.S. Military Academy - Ordnance Compound Privies
(Ordnance Compound Towers)

HABS No. NY-5708-12

East of the intersection of Ruger and Howard Roads, on the
southeast and southwest corners of the Ordnance Compound

U.S. Military Academy

West Point

Orange County

New York

HABS
NY
36-10890
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY - ORDNANCE COMPOUND PRIVIES
(ORDNANCE COMPOUND TOWERS)

LOCATION: East of the intersection of Ruger and Howard Roads, on the southeast and southwest corners of the Ordnance Compound, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, Orange County, New York.

USGS, West Point Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 18.587020.4582880 and 18.587000.4582880.

PRESENT OWNER
AND OCCUPANT

U.S. Military Academy, Department of the Army.

PRESENT USE:

Cadet Activity Club; storage.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Ordnance Compound is the earliest Gothic Revival structure at West Point and is considered to be one of three buildings from the 1830s-40s which became stylistic prototypes for subsequent designs, most notably those by Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1840. A discrepancy exists over the date of erection, that of 1838 or 1840. Williams's Facilities Report and drawings at the National Archives (Grashof) give the date as 1840. Robert Lange in "An Overview" states that the Compound was complete in 1840.
2. Architect: Tradition holds that Major Richard Delafield, Superintendent of the Academy in 1838, designed the Ordnance Compound. There is little evidence to substantiate or deny this attribution although Lange states that construction on the Compound might have been started before Delafield arrived at the Academy. Drawings at the U.S. Military Academy Special Collections, which are dated 1838-39, give credit to Delafield. Perhaps the strongest evidence in Delafield's favor is the similarity in style and construction to the Library (now demolished) and the Cadet Barracks (Central Barracks HABS No. NY-5708-8), which he designed in 1841 and 1851 respectively. See Lange's "Overview" for a discussion of the Library and the Cadet Barracks.
3. Original and subsequent owners: U.S. Military Academy, Department of the Army.
4. Builders: Unknown.
5. Original plans and construction: The exterior of the privies appears to be unaltered. It is unknown just what the interiors looked like

during the time they functioned as privies but it can be assumed that they contained bench seats attached to the walls. It is not known to what use the second floor was put but access was undoubtedly by ladder through an opening in the ceiling. When the use of the privies discontinued and the structures were adapted for other use, the privy pits were probably sealed off or filled. All lancet windows on both floors have been filled with brick; it is not known whether these were originally glazed.

The perimeter walls, to which the privies are attached, are relatively unaltered. Evidence of shed attachments, which can be seen on twentieth-century drawings, were probably additions.

Boynton's History of West Point, 1863, states that "The Ordnance and Artillery Laboratory on the north side of the Plain, was erected in 1840, and consists of three two-story stone buildings, used for fabrication of ammunition, repairing, etc.; all within a stone-enclosed yard, containing, besides shelter for Field Batteries" (Boynton, p. 261).

6. Alterations and additions: Only 635-A (HABS No. NY-5708-12) has been examined on the interior, and that was limited to the first floor. Alterations are undated and consist, on the exterior, of later concrete steps on 635-A; later doors for both structures; bricked-up windows for both; and possibly later roofs for both. Interior alterations include the removal benches, and the replacement of the floor boards on the first floor. Drawings in the Facilities Engineer's Office, U.S. Military Academy, dated 1952, indicate that the wainscoting in 635-B has been removed.

B. Historical Context:

"The Board of Visitors' Report of 1826 recommended that a gun house be erected to protect artillery pieces from exposure to the weather. Subsequently, the Board of Visitors' Report for 1833 stated that a gun house, a laboratory, and a magazine should provide shelter for Ordnance equipment and Ordnance stores. This resulted in the building of the present compound wall and the three original buildings comprising the Ordnance and Artillery Laboratory in 1837. Unfortunately, records are not available that indicate the cost of these buildings; but it is believed that the Act of Congress for the support of the Military Academy approved 2 March 1837 for appropriation of \$8,000.00 was expended for the construction of this laboratory.

"The Guide Book to West Point in July of 1844 states, 'The plan and arrangement of this structure is such as to excite our curiosity. The Towers are designed for the storage of various kinds of Ordnance.' During the early years of the compound, the compound yard with its Revolutionary trophies was the predecessor to the Ordnance Museum founded in 1854 and today known as the West Point Museum.

"Later, the Ordnance and Artillery Laboratory was known as the Ordnance Compound. This took place after the subject of Ordnance was transferred from the Instructor of Artillery to the Instructor of Ordnance and Gunnery on 27 February 1857. Ordnance as a subject, was taught in the Compound from 1837 to 1913 when the Department of Ordnance and Science of Gunnery moved to the newly built East Academic Building. The Ordnance Detachment

lived in the barracks within the Compound from 1837 to 1947, when the detachment moved to another location. Upon the movement of the Ordnance troops from the Compound, the flank buildings were converted into apartments for enlisted men and the main building and the little building were used as a photographic laboratory." ("Historical Background on the First Class Compound," Dedication of Benet Hall leaflet, 11 October 1964, U.S. Military Academy Archives.)

The Department of Ordnance and Gunnery was an essential part of a cadet's training in the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth century. The history of both the department and its courses was described in the Annual Report of 1897, which is reproduced and found in the Supplemental Material section of HABS No. NY-5708-9.

A description of the Ordnance Lab from the 1902 Annual Report outlines its functions at that time. "The routine work at the laboratory by the ordnance detachment includes the care and preservation of all the service and obsolete ordnance, trophy guns, etc., at the post, the preparation of ammunition and blank cartridges for cadet practice and drill, the manufacture of fireworks, and such repairs and other work connected with guns, carriages, small arms, ammunition, and ordnance supplies generally as may be necessary in the practical instruction of cadets in their various duties." In the twentieth century the ordnance department lost much of its early significance and its original buildings were gradually converted for other uses. In 1961 the Ordnance Compound buildings were dedicated as the First Class Club in honor of three former instructors: Brigadier General Stephen Vincent Benet, USMA 1849, Major General William Crozier, USMA 1876, and Colonel James G. Benton, USMA 1842 (see Supplemental Material).

For the historical context of the Ordnance Compound within the overall development of the Academy see HABS No. NY-5708, Volume 2: "West Point: An Overview of the History and Physical Development of the United States Military Academy."

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Ordnance Compound Privies are the only remaining structures of their type at West Point. Stylistically, they are part of the other contemporary buildings in the Compound, all designed in a simple Tudor Gothic Revival style.
2. Condition of fabric: The Privies are in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The Privies are two story, octagonal structures measuring 5'-0" on each side. There is one bay per side.
2. Foundations: Foundation walls cannot be seen above grade but it can be assumed that they are the same granite as the principal walls.
3. Walls: The walls are rock-faced granite laid in a random range ashlar pattern. This same brown and gray granite was used for the

other contemporary parts of the Ordnance Compound and for the Cadet Barracks (HABS No. NY-5708-8). The old Library is said to have had the same granite as well. Granite is used for the walls while a reddish-brown sandstone (?) is used for jambs, lintels, sills, the cornice and weatherings. Above the cornice the walls end with a crenelated parapet.

4. Structural system, framing: Structural systems consist of load-bearing stone walls, wooden joist floors and probably a wooden rafter roof.
5. Chimneys: There are no chimneys.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There is one doorway into each Privy. Each has granite jamb stones and a one piece granite lintel. Each doorway has a replacement panelled door on butt-hinges.
 - b. Windows: All of the windows have been filled with brick. At the upper level a window occupies each of the eight sides but at the ground floor level the doorway and attached perimeter walls limit the windows to five sides. Each splayed window opening has a sandstone (?) tre-foil lintel, jambs and sill. It is not known whether these windows were originally glazed.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Both Privies have a truncated conical roof with raised, exposed rafters, between which is an unidentified layered covering.
 - b. Cornice: The coved, projecting sandstone cornice is similar to those used on the other contemporary buildings of the Compound.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The first floor of 635-A is an open eight-sided room measuring 8'-5" side between any two facets. The second floor of 635-A was not examined nor was 635-B but their plans are probably similar. Drawings in the Facilities Engineer's Office (1952) indicate that the interior of 635-B is 6" wider than its counterpart because of unfinished (i.e., no panelling) brick walls.
2. Stairways: There are no stairways. Presumably, ladders were used to reach the second floor through a 2' square floor scuttle.
3. Flooring: The floor of 635-A is concrete on the first floor and presumably wood on the second. Drawings in the Facilities Engineer's Office (1952) indicate that 635-B is similar.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Panelling covers the brick walls of 635-A up to the 9'-5" sheathed ceiling. Drawings in the Facilities Engineer's Office (1952) indicate that there is no panelling in 635-B and that the ceiling there is 9' high.

5. Openings: All window openings have been filled with brick.
 6. Mechanical equipment: There is no known equipment. A vent stack on the roof of 635-B serves an unknown function.
- D. Site:
1. General setting and orientation: The Ordnance Compound is on a hill and is principally oriented north, downhill, toward the Hudson River. The Privies are situated in the southeast and southwest corners of the Compound and are attached to the perimeter wall. Between the Privies on the south wall are two gateways which form a secondary entrance to the Compound. North of the Privies in the center of the Compound is the Blacksmith/Carpenter Shop (HABS No. NY-5708-9) and beyond that, the other buildings of the Compound (see sketch of the Compound). To the west of Privy 635-A is Howard Road and the Enlisted Men's Quarters (HABS No. NY-5708-16). To the east of Privy 635-B is a modern building containing public restrooms (U.S.M.A. No. 631). East of the entire Compound the ground rises to an intermediate plateau containing the amphitheater and then rises further to the Plain. This area to the east was also the famed Execution Hollow, which according to historical accounts, was an execution site during the Revolutionary War. It was filled-in early in the twentieth century. The Ordnance Compound is on the northwest edge of the Academic Area identified in Lange's "Historical Overview."

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural Drawings: Original drawings are in the U.S. Military Academy Special Collections and at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. (Record Group 77, Drawer 32, Sheets 18 and 19, Records of the Office of the Chief Engineer, Cartographic and Architectural Branch). Subsequent alteration drawings are in the Facilities Engineer's Office, Directorate of Engineering and Housing, U.S. Military Academy.
- B. Early Views: Early photographs can be found in the U.S. Military Academy Archives and Special Collections. Some of these are reproduced in the Grashof and Lange volumes of this project.
- C. Bibliography:
 1. Primary and unpublished sources: Records, U.S. Military Academy Archives and Special Collections. See bibliographic essay in the Lange volume of this project for a listing of record groups.
 2. Secondary and published sources:

Annual Reports, U.S. Military Academy.

Boynton, Edward C. History of West Point and Its Military Importance During the American Revolution And the Origin and Progress of the United States Military Academy. New York: Van Nostrand, 1863.

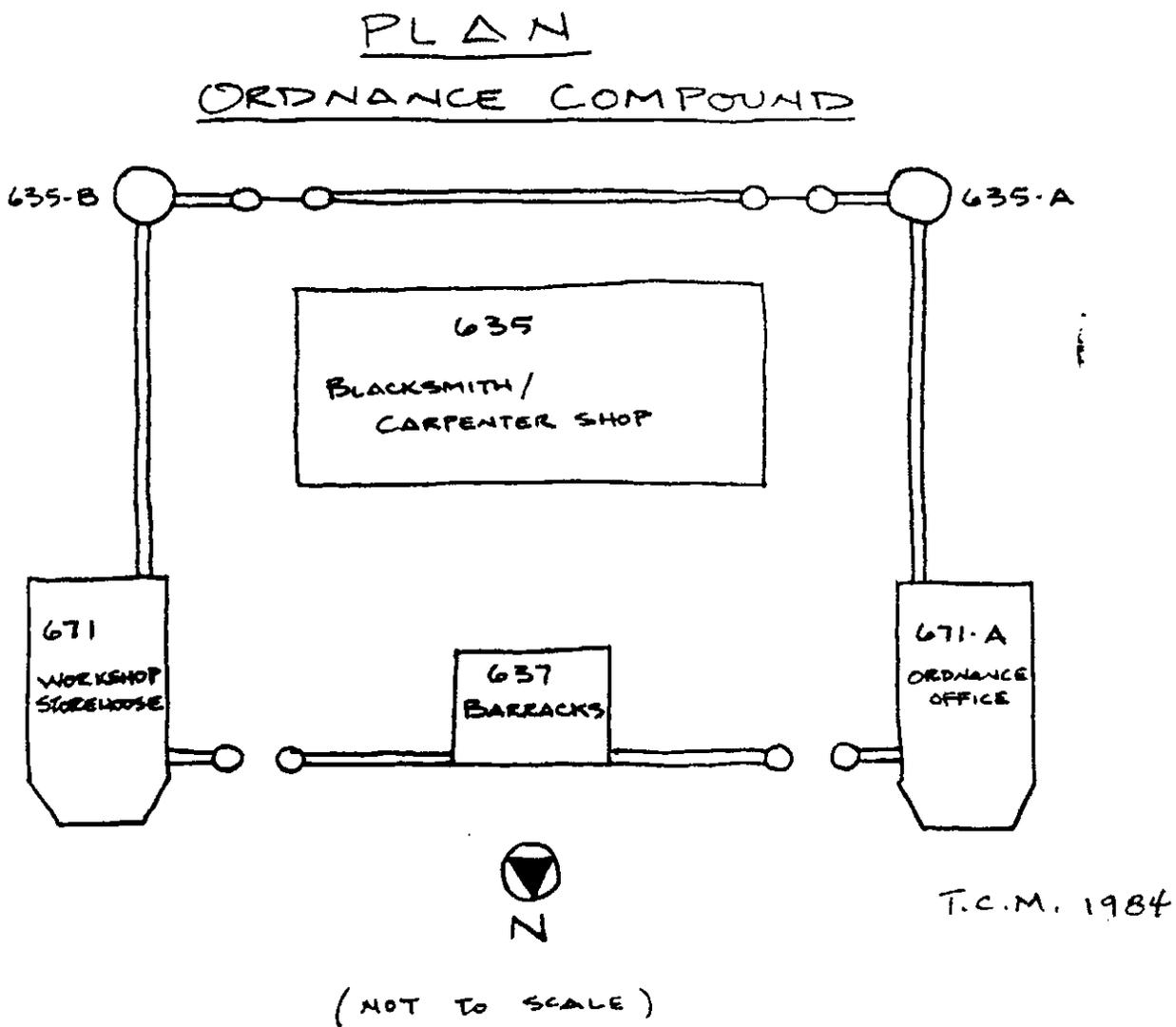
Grashof, Bethanie C. "Building Analysis and Preservation Guidelines for Category I and Selected Category II Buildings at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York," Historic American Buildings Survey, 1983. HABS No. NY-5708.

Lange, Robie S. "West Point: An Overview of the History and Physical Development of the United States Military Academy," Historic American Buildings Survey, 1983. HABS No. NY-5708.

- D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- E. Supplemental Material:
 - 1. Sketch plan of Ordnance Compound.

E. Supplemental Material

1. Sketch Plan of Ordnance Compound.



PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This documentation is part of a multi-year project sponsored by the National Park Service and the United States Military Academy, explained in the United States Military Academy, HABS No. NY-5708, Volume 1, "Methodology." This written documentation was prepared by Travis C. McDonald, Jr., architectural historian, in 1982-1985 based on field work conducted in 1982.